

cover story

HOT WHEELS

How the Fiesta Movement
got Ford's motor running

By Sandra O'Loughlin



When Ford's zippy Fiesta hits American streets this year, to the casual observer it will look like a fun, affordable ride. With a sticker price of less than \$15,000, some models come with a message center and trip computer on the dashboard, a floor console with a USB port and other amenities designed to appeal to hip, urban drivers and even some segments of the boomer crowd. They're pretty easy on the gas, too.

But to brand marketers in the know, these colorful little subcompacts epitomize a new era at Ford. Since the company was founded in 1903, it has been known for safety, reliability and innovation. But a sexy set of wheels? Other than, perhaps, the T-bird in the '50s and the Mustang a decade later, not so much. With gas-guzzlers like the Ford Explorer and its hefty Ford trucks, the brand over the years had lost relevance with today's influential Gen Y and millennial car buyers. The Fiesta, however, with high-tech touches usually reserved for higher-end luxury autos, offers the connectivity that appeals to modern consumers and is being launched at the epicenter of the evolving experiential marketing model—which combines online and offline.

GRASSROOTS GURUS:

The Ford team (from left): Jeff Eggen, Car Experiential Marketing Manager; Connie Fontaine, Manager, U.S. Luxury and Non-Traditional Marketing; Kerry Doyle, SVP, Account Director-Brand Content & Alliances; Kristen Naimi, VP, Management Supervisor-Brand Content & Alliances; Curt Jaksen, SVP, Group Account Director-Brand Content & Alliances

Ford marketers capitalized on the car's features and the social media trend to generate awareness for the car in an experiential and digital campaign dubbed the Fiesta Movement. Even competitors call it nothing short of genius.

Let us set the stage: Ford's 2010 Fiesta is a direct descendant of a model that has been a big seller in Europe and other areas of the world since its introduction in 1976. An early version even sold briefly in the U.S. until it was yanked in favor of cars more in keeping with the American preference for big, comfortable sedans and SUVs. But by 2009, with Americans in the mood for smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, the time seemed right to reintroduce the Fiesta to its homeland.

It also was a time when the country, mired in dire economic straits, could use some good news. People were losing their jobs and houses nearly every day. The automotive industry was failing, too. People who were worried about buying food were no longer willing to plunk down their hard-earned cash for those costly SUVs. Add to that the bad publicity that arose when executives from troubled Chrysler and General Motors, which had received





billions in federal government loans through TARP (the Troubled Asset Relief Program), flew in private jets to Washington, D.C. to testify before congress, and you had an industry in turmoil.

And then there was Ford, which had just launched the new Fusion as well as Taurus and now had the Fiesta, which it could put up against the Honda Fit, the Toyota Yaris, the Chevy Aveo and the Nissan Versa, all of which had made solid strides into the subcompact market. It also had a new outlook and no federal bailout dough to drag it down.

“One of the opportunities with the Fiesta Movement was not only to market Fiesta and make sure we got that name out there, but also to put an important stake in the ground about Ford, not only the fact that we were competing globally in the car market, and we really were a reinvigorated car company, but also that we were the kind of car company that has these innovations not only in design and technology, but also in marketing,” says Connie Fontaine, Manager, U.S. Luxury and Non-Traditional Marketing.

Hence the challenge issued to his team early in 2009 by Jim Farley, Ford’s global head of marketing, when he asked, “What would you do if I could get you 100 to 200 of these cars? How would you use them?” The answer knocked his—and the industry’s—socks off, and became one of the most effective campaigns to connect the world of experiential marketing with social media to date.

THE MOVEMENT

Fontaine’s team first tackled Farley’s challenge with some classic thinking around a series of national test-drives, but ran into concerns about cost. She and her team at Ford and lead agency Team Detroit kept at it until the answer—to introduce the car virtually—eventually became clear. “I can’t say the specific time or date the idea literally came to fruition,” she admits, “but it evolved as we thought through how to get the most number of eyeballs on this virtually without spending big dollars on mass media.”

And so the Fiesta Movement was born.

“Our objective was to create awareness, excitement and interest in the car, and the challenge that we had was that it was a year prior to launch,” says Kerry Doyle, senior vp at Team Detroit. “That was a little unusual, but we had a unique situation on our hands. We were starting to talk about the new Ford, and we felt that Fiesta and the Fiesta Movement could provide some evidence of that change.”

Fontaine and Jeff Eggen, Car/CUV experiential marketing manager at Ford, managed the program on Ford’s end. “It was a tactical challenge because we didn’t add any people,” Fontaine says. “It was com-

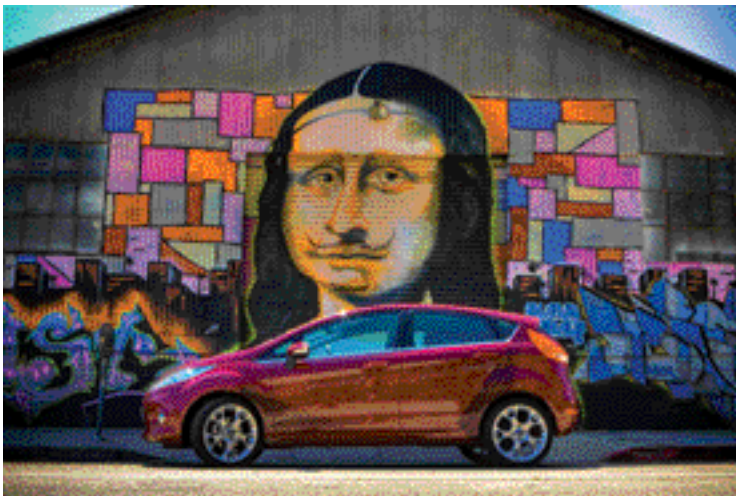


“If you are going to do any innovative marketing you need to be able to take some sort of risk and you need to be willing to try new things. In some cases there is going to be an element of risk but it just has to be measured to understand what it is, and to make sure that you mitigate it in any way possible and be brave enough to move forward if you still think it is the right thing to do.”

pletely unexpected as an opportunity that we ended up creating, but no one person on my team or at the agency was dedicated to this program only.”

Fontaine and Eggen worked closely with Team Detroit, where Doyle ensured the integrity of the ideas was maintained and along with Kristen Naimi managed the program daily. Doyle also reached out to other disciplines within the agency, namely its planning and creative teams. Team Detroit also relied on digital think tank Undercurrent, Action Marketing Group for logistics and test-drives and eshots for lead-gen and data-collection in the field.

Fiesta Movement was a grassroots campaign in which Ford gave a new 2009 European model Fiesta, plus gas and insurance, to each of 100 socially vibrant consumers for six months. In exchange, these influencers spent time online “lifestreaming” their experiences with the car, completing monthly



SPECIAL AGENTS: Content creators and social media influencers got the Fiesta Movement going. Ford kept up the momentum with a series of monthly missions and adventures.

missions and posting content in real time that highlighted the Fiesta on social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. Their content was then captured through a unique hash tag onto one website, fiestamovement.com, where each agent also had a profile. Ford did not put any restrictions on what the agents could say, nor did it edit any content posted. The agents spoke and created content freely, without restraint.

“The agents weren’t selected by age or anything other than geography, creativity and their connectivity out on the wide open space,” Fontaine says. “Those selected already had strong followings either on Twitter and Facebook. Some were unbelievable photographers with a strong following on Flickr and other places. They were not just target customers but also able to help us get the word out and because they could get the word out so effectively we were

able to reach our audience.”

Besides their connectivity, agents were also chosen for their ability to create content. “We knew we wanted engaging, interesting content, not just content, so they submitted video applications so we could see that level of expertise and whether or not they were really passionate and engaged with the process,” Fontaine added.

Ford culled through more than 4,000 applications in a deep review process that included personal interviews with those who made it past the first couple of levels. “We looked for real examples,” says Eggen. “We dug into their own social media channels that they use to look for examples of how they can tell a story and convey their exciting lives. We wanted to put an exciting car that we knew would be compelling into their lives and we knew we were also going to give them interesting things to do. The thing we couldn’t control was how they told that story, but they had a proven track record of being able to do that.”

After settling on the 100 agents and importing the cars, Ford held six two-day training sessions around the country. Day One took place at a cool venue like a club or a restaurant to review the components of the program. “It was fun because a lot of the agents had known each other online but had never met in person,” says Doyle.

Day Two took place at a track where the agents received their cars, drove them and tested their features, including the cool Sync AppLink, which allows drivers to access and control smartphone apps with voice commands and vehicle controls. “As soon as they saw the cars parked there, they started screaming on the bus,” Doyle says. “They all ran out to their cars. Some knew which was theirs because of the individualized tattoos on them. They were hugging the cars, dancing around the cars and they had their video cameras going. They were very excited to have been chosen, excited about the experience; they knew this was probably one of the biggest social media experiments ever done.”

AGENTS OF CHANGE

And they were off on a series of monthly missions designed around themes that would appeal to the Fiesta’s target audience—travel, social activism, technology, adventure, style, design and entertainment. The adventure missions, for example, had one agent on a road trip in her Fiesta go hang gliding off the same mountain where she was recently married. Another agent tried out his Fiesta on a racetrack and filmed the experience from the inside of the car.

In a travel mission, one agent drove his Fiesta to his favorite restaurant, bought one of everything on



the menu, loaded it up in his car, then gave it all away to passersby and videotaped their reactions. Another Fiesta agent created a custom Fiesta-inspired Mimobot, which is a line of designer USB flash drives, for one of her missions. Another drove his Fiesta to the Will It Blend? test lab, a viral marketing sensation in its own right by kitchen appliance brand Blendtec, to try blending a couple of pieces from the car.

The enthusiastic agents created videos beyond what was required. (Check out the funny Hot Chicks Washing Car video on YouTube, for an example.) One agent got married in a wedding dress and flowers the color of her car—Squeeze Green—and posted it on YouTube. Another drove across the country twice. Agents also filmed traditional test drives of the Fiestas that were held in their areas.

“We thought we were going to generate 600 pieces of unique content, but by the time we were done, we had more than 57,000,” Doyle says. “These agents were so enthusiastic and they liked to share, which was great.”

The program went off without a hitch. Other than a few flat tires, the only other problem occurred when one agent thought his car had been stolen. “It had actually been towed, so in the end, it was rather funny,” Doyle says.

The results speak for themselves. Ford achieved 56 percent nameplate familiarity for the Fiesta, which according to Doyle is “huge” within the automotive industry. “And we were able to achieve that many months prior to launch,” she says. Add to that the more than 50,000 pieces of content created by the agents, almost a million Flickr photos taken, 40 million Twitter and 300 million media impressions.

GOING INTO HIGH GEAR

With all this momentum, Ford just couldn’t walk away, so as it came closer to physically launching the Fiesta and having the cars in market, the program evolved into a more hands-on phase with teams of agents holding events where their friends, followers and fans could see and touch it. So, in November, it announced Chapter 2 of the Movement, which this time involved 20 groups of two people who, in keeping with the integrity of the original part of the program, competed for prizes of varying dollar amounts and the chance to win a Fiesta by completing four missions. In one mission, Chapter 2 agents created a series of short movies, then held a premiere at a local theater where they would view the movies and show off the car as well. In another, they held a recognition event for a local artist or band.

“They were agents and creative content cre-

ators, but they also were slightly more plugged in to their communities,” Doyle says. “We got people to experience the car in a slightly more engaging way than the agents did in Chapter 1 because we were closer to launch and were focused more on some of the elements of the vehicle.”

All told, Fiesta Movement and the test drives generated more than 100,000 hand raisers, people who indicated an interest in buying the car. When Ford opened its reservation system in the beginning of December, it had more than 10,000 reservations. “These are people who went in, built and priced a car and placed a reservation,” says Angie Kozleski, car communications manager at Ford. “The next step is the conversion from reservations to orders, and we ended up seeing a 14 percent conversion rate. Since the conversion rate of a typical CRM program is one to two percent, we are very pleased with the results of this program.”

As successful as it was, the Fiesta Movement is not an effort that would necessarily work for other brands, like Lincoln, which also is receiving a great deal of Ford’s marketing muscle. “You won’t find the same kind of consumer, the same kind of online activity within that target consumer [group],” Fontaine says. “So you’d find different ways to talk to that consumer, just like you would with any other brand. Look at Explorer. There are ways to be really smart and efficient online and to market Explorer, and we’re doing that right now as well.”

But for Millennials and Gen Y consumers, the Fiesta Movement was right on. “With this group, it was definitely the right thing to do, to put the products in the hands of the people to talk about it,” Doyle says. “We basically turned it over to them. We helped, we gave them some ideas of things to say but we couldn’t have said it better than what they said. It is good to do things that take a little more courage to do. You need to be more courageous in marketing now to break through all the clutter out there. Basically, you need to go big or go home.”

Or go social. The new Ford realizes that social media is here to stay. “There are agents in every way, shape or form in anything we do,” Fontaine says. “Our team leads the Warriors in Pink breast cancer platform where there are agents. There are people there that are passionately beating that drum as well, so we are leveraging them. It’s a philosophy that we in a sense tested, learned from and are trying to take those learnings to everything we do.”

How that plays out with the new Ford Focus, which launches in the fourth quarter this year, remains to be seen, but here’s a hint: “Fiesta Movement Plus,” says Doyle.

Agents, start your engines. **EM**