



THE CADILLAC OF EVENT MARKETING

ONE OF THE ORIGINAL AUTO BRANDS IS DRIVING FULL SPEED AHEAD WITH NEW CARS, NEW TARGET MARKETS AND A PORTFOLIO OF EVENTS THAT ACCELERATE EVERY STOP IN THE PURCHASE FUNNEL BY SANDRA O'LOUGHLIN

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY SAUGER

BACK: (LEFT TO RIGHT) Dan Jones, VP, Sponsorship & Event Marketing, Intersport

Jamie Kavanagh, Experiential Marketing Specialist, R*Works

Jim Boedecker, Account Director, Sponsorship & Event Marketing, Intersport

Drew Russell, Assoc. VP, Sponsorship & Event Marketing, Intersport

Troy Pigott, Executive Producer, EEI Global

Ben Meikle, Program Manager, Pratt & Miller

Stefanie Carroll, Experiential Marketing Specialist, R*Works

Braden Graham, Account Director, EEI Global

FRONT:

(LEFT TO RIGHT) John Sattler, Vice President, R*Works

Mary Lobbstaal, Vice President, R*Works

Steve Haener, Promotions Manager, Cadillac





GOING FOR THE GREEN:
Cadillac taps passion points through targeted golf clinics and ride and drive programs.



Bailouts, schmailouts. With consumer confidence up and Obama repaid, a recharged auto industry is on a roll.

Car sales are revving up, driven largely by new product and technical innovation. And to get the word out, automakers are putting more fuel than ever into events. Across the board, spending on experiential marketing by car brands is up by double-digit percentage points across ride and drives, sponsorships, mobile tours and lifestyle programs that tap into consumer passion points like sports, shopping and other leisure activities—with the goal, as you would expect, of getting consumers kicking tires, behind the wheels and ultimately into a car dealership.

Few are doing it more aggressively than Cadillac, the quintessential American emblem of success GM acquired for \$6 million back in 1909. But make no mistake: This is not your granddaddy's Coupe de Ville. With its sleek lines and luxury appeal, Cadillac's newest coupe, the CTS, is totally today. Ditto for the CTS Sport Sedan, the SRX Crossover and Cadillac's fast, performance V-Series vehicles. A slick new campaign narrated by actor Laurence Fishburne, print ads in high-profile magazines, a spot on the NASDAQ board in New York City's Times Square and a six-year agreement with the PGA Tour to title-sponsor the World Golf Championship at Doral in March all attest to Cadillac's new style and newfound marketing muscle.

As the product has evolved and the company has restructured since the bailout, so has the need to reconnect face-to-face with consumers. "There is a dated perception of what Cadillac products are and what they stand for," says Steve Haener, national sales promotions manager for the brand. "Just look at the CTS-V Coupe, with its striking design and sharp edges. You'd never associate that with something that is dated or old. The only way to prove that to people is to get them behind the wheel at an event."

And that's where event marketing, which Haener says accounts for a "significant" percentage of Cadillac's overall marketing budget, comes in. The brand team works hand in hand with long-time lead marketing shop R*Works, Detroit, and a handful of other agencies to develop an event strategy that focuses on the customer as well as the product. This year, in addition to the Cadillac Golf Innovation Clinics, the brand introduced two new programs—the Cadillac Culinary Challenge, a cook-off at upscale malls to attract the Cuisinart crowd, and the V Series Challenge, an event for serious driving enthusiasts at exclusive, closed circuit race tracks. Both are being used to accomplish multiple objectives within singular campaigns, a huge trend in 2011. And in many instances, Caddy is using event marketing simultaneously for acquisition and retention, another red-hot strategy among face-to-facers these days.

THE PERFECT SWING

"This is a very exciting time for Cadillac, a time to go back and reinvest in our strategy and drive Cadillac forward in the marketplace," says Mary Lobbestael, vp at R*Works, who has worked on the Cadillac brand the better part of 10 years and plays captain for partner event agencies including Chicago's Inter-



INNOVATION COMES TO THE FORE:
(Clockwise, from top left) Registration made easy; a cavalcade of Cadillacs; swinging with David Leadbetter; the inside story.



GONE SHOPPIN': Cadillac events reach consumers at upscale malls.

sport (well-known for its work on the golf platforms) and Motown's EEI Global (which works on the V Series).

For the brand, live events are not mass market affairs. Cadillac strategically targets two groups: in-market luxury consumers, and conquest buyers, those fans of German engineering or Japanese ingenuity. The Innovation Golf Clinics offer a high-exposure, low-pressure environment for 1,000 participants a day, 500 in the morning, 500 in the afternoon, who get up close and personal with the cars, receive semi-private professional golf instruction and try out new Callaway golf clubs. Except for a one-year hiatus during the bailout period, Cadillac has hosted more than 80 such clinics across the U.S. since 2003. Last year, the company held 12 in 10 luxury markets where current Cadillac owners and potential ones abound. "While we want to retain and keep our current customers enthusiastic about the brand, we also want to get new people into the vehicle," Haener says.

A direct mail and email consultancy helps create a guest list based on geography, income and enthusiasm for golf. About a month before the event, invitations go out through the mail to attend a half-day clinic, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or 1 to 6 p.m.

On-site at Cadillac branded registration tents attendees enter their information into an electronic database capturing system that prints a name tag with an individual barcode that syncs their name and email address. They fill out test drive waivers, get an itinerary card and proceed to a nearby test-drive area, typically a three- to five-minute route. About 95 percent of attendees opt to take a spin behind the wheel.

After their test drive and breakfast or lunch, they swing Callaway clubs on the driving range, where Cadillac has strategically placed its full line-up, the SRX, Escalade Hybrid, CTS-V, CTS, CTS Wagon and CTS Coupe. A Cadillac rep welcomes the group, which is seated on bleachers with Cadillac branded banners, then divided into 20 smaller groups. "Golfers are passionate and have high expectations, so we devised a plan where we can deliver 1,000 people, but the majority of the experience takes place in groups of

25," says Dan Jones, vp-sponsorship and event marketing at Intersport.

Volunteers accompany the smaller groups to on-course stations for 20-minute sessions of semi-private instruction from local Callaway golf pros in driving, chipping, swing analysis and putting, as well as information from a Cadillac product specialist on the SRX, CTS-V and the Escalade Hybrid. Hole-in-one and closest to the pin contests add to the fun.

The morning session ends with a presentation and brief Q&A with golfing icon David Leadbetter, one of the sport's preeminent teachers, who appears after lunch in the afternoon sessions. Leadbetter also participates in a private luncheon for regional guests and VIPs.

Sessions wrap up with guests receiving a Cadillac gift, which includes a hat and items from the participating golf courses, such as gift certificates to the pro shop.

This year, the program included multiple digital touch points in addition to the in-person, on-site experience. Upon registering online, consumers received a video message from Leadbetter thanking them for confirming and building anticipation for the day. A second Leadbetter video was sent a few days prior to the event.

Post-event, attendees received two additional digital videos—a personalized swing analysis by a PGA professional, which was added to the clinics this year, and a highlight video featuring the best moments of the day. To receive their swing analysis, however, they had to complete a post-event survey.

A TASTE OF THE GOOD LIFE

Cadillac's customer focused-strategy this year led to a new program, the Culinary Challenge, a 13-stop marketing tour that launched in May and ran through October at upscale shopping venues on Saturdays and Sundays.

"Culinary provides an opportunity to speak to a female market, specifically at a time when we were launching SRX, which tends to be a female-focused vehicle. We saw that as a natural avenue for luxury customers that complements our other promotion platforms," Lobbestael says. "Our research showed this is a natural fit for Cadillac, and that this would be a strong pillar to support the brand."

The Culinary Challenge incorporated a test drive, vehicle and technology displays, chef challenges and an innovation lounge where attendees could learn more about Cadillac while noshing on complimentary coffee, Fiji water and individually packaged, Cadillac-branded fruit and nut mixtures. A concierge helped arrange extended test drives with local dealers, for those so



inclined. But what set these events apart, and proves Cadillac's marketing moxie, is that in a very public setting attendees got to drive three competitive brands—the Lexus RX350, Mercedes ML350 and BMW 535i Sports Wagon—as well as the SRX Crossover, CTS Sports Wagon and Escalade Hybrid.

"That was another strategic decision," Lobbestael says. "The SRX launch provided an opportunity to go head to head against the established competition. Cadillac was confident in the product, and that provided us the opportunity to launch in a very open, highly visible setting."

While the experience was focused on competitive driving, the convenience factor for attendees was huge. "If you tried to do it on your own, and go from car to car to car, that's an all-day proposition, plus you have a sales person looking over your shoulder," Haener says. "This is low-pressure and casual."

As expected, attendance skewed a little more female, although the events drew their share of couples. From an income perspective and demographic, however, attendance was pretty much the same as the golf events.

When they weren't test driving Cadillac or one of the competitive vehicles, guests could view static vehicle displays staffed by product specialists. Technology displays featured engine and transmission cutaways and product from Cadillac partners Bose, XM, AutoNet and OnStar. Chef Challenges took place daily at 11:30 a.m. and at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. in the Culinary Tent where

CULINARY CHALLENGE: Consumers get a taste of the competition.

local chefs prepared regional fare with a "theme ingredient" and culinary expert Mary Nolan served as hostess. Guests sampled the chefs' creations, asked questions and received recipe cards, courtesy of Cadillac's partner *Bon Appétit* magazine. A panel of three consumers acting as taste testers chose a winner of each session and a popular vote determined who was the "Cadillac of Chefs."

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The challenge theme continued with the V Series Challenge, a series of five invitation-only, high-end events held at select, prestigious race tracks like the Monticello Motor Club, Laguna Seca and others that targeted automotive enthusiasts and conquest drivers of the BMW M Series or the Mercedes-Benz AMG.

"We ran a similar program when Cadillac launched the CTS-V Sedan a couple of years ago," Lobbestael says. "We felt the success of that event and the overall cachet of V series demanded its own event platform, especially considering that the V family was expanded with the V coupe and the V wagon. After several strategy sessions with the marketing team at Cadillac, we felt the best way to showcase the V series is on track. It is so track capable in its production format that it deserved an event of its own."

One hundred people attended each session, with two sessions

START YOUR ENGINES: The V Series takes to the track.

held per day. Fridays were reserved for Cadillac V Series owners; conquest drivers came on Saturdays and Sundays, for a total of 600 people over the three-day period.

The wow factor began as attendees entered the track area where visual cues reflected the high style of the vehicles. “The Coupe has such a unique design and distinctive styling cues, we wanted to make sure the display elements for the experience fit with a unique design of its own,” says Braden Graham, account director at EEI Global.

Branded stutter banners flapped in the breeze along the driveway coming in, and nearer the event site 10-foot tall obelisks lent a Cadillac look and feel. A 50- by 70-foot Cadillac-branded tent was constructed with a black stone façade, giving it the look of an actual building. Graphics on the 10-foot-tall curved back walls in the registration area showcased the vehicles that would be driven. Custom-built registration desks reflected the Cadillac’s luxury image, while a “DNA” wall, on the back of the registration wall, demonstrated elements that make a V a V—the Eaton Supercharger, Brembo brakes, Recaro performance seats and the special hood and grill. The opposite wall showcased accessories like matte-black wheels, yellow Brembo calipers and a spoiler that consumers can add to personalize the cars.

After registration, guests were greeted by John Heinricy, retired top-dog test-driver and director of GM’s performance division, then headed to the track where they went through three modules, dividing their time between classroom instruction in 20-foot by 20-foot trackside branded tents and actual driving. In module one, they took the 304-horsepower CTS Coupe through a straight line acceleration and brake exercise; module two featured the 556-horsepower V sedan and information on the magnetic ride control suspension system, brakes and tires, with experts from Brembo and Michelin as instructors. Module three was the highlight of the day—a full track drive behind the wheel of the V Coupe with a professional driver from Skip Barber Racing riding shotgun. An in-car video camera captured the action inside the car while another caught a view of the track, measuring speed, RPMs and more. Attendees received a copy afterwards as a souvenir.

“The only way you can really experience how the vehicle performs is on a closed-track environment,” Haener says. “You can’t really accomplish that on a street drive.”

Attendees at all three types of events filled out a survey that indicated, among other things, where they were in the purchase horizon. “We’ve been able to very strategically affect all parts of the purchase funnel with these events, which is a pretty rare combination,” says Lobbestael. “To varying degrees we have raised awareness, more of an upper-funnel aspect of these programs, as well as drive people down the funnel and get into consideration sets among luxury intenders who maybe didn’t look at Cadillac before. And then ultimately, yes, we always try for sales.”

A WORLD-CLASS EXPERIENCE

Even if people don’t buy today, Cadillac looks at the events as dialog-starters and an opportunity to continue the conversation. “We want



to make sure that the world-class experience that we have given the guests on-site transfers over to the dealership,” Haener says.

To guarantee that connection, Cadillac for the past year has been working with the Ritz-Carlton’s Leadership Center, which offers courses in customer service for employees across all types of industries. “Little things like opening the door for someone or walking them where they need to go as opposed to pointing, can make a difference,” Haener says. “We are trying to go after every detail to give them a world-class experience no matter where they are interacting with Cadillac, whether that be at a track event or walking through the doors of a dealership.”

Also new this year is an increased role of social media through the swing analysis at the golf clinics and the personal drive experience video. “We don’t generate content for the sake of content and hope that people will pass it around,” Haener says. “We think that providing an in-depth swing analysis by a PGA Professional that helps people improve their game is cool, and that people will want to pass that around because it has inherent value. The drive video speaks for itself because that’s not something that people get to do every day.”

Still, Haener admits, there is no silver bullet for success. “Events have always been effective, but you need a strong mix,” he says. “TV is great in creating awareness of a product; you need to have a strong digital presence so people can find you and get information on your product, but experiential is that last thing for people that are in the market to be able to learn more and do it in a no-pressure environment. Done correctly, it all works together.”

Just like a well-oiled engine. **EM**