



MMA CASE STUDY

SMARTIES Take the Wheel

Campaign Summary

With an average age of 54, Mercedes-Benz buyers are five years older than both BMW and Audi buyers, and today's Millennials prefer the competition to Mercedes-Benz given its "old luxury" stereotype. To combat this and launch the all-new CLA, the brand turned to five popular Instagramers who competed to post the best photos for a chance to win their very own CLA.

Strategy

Objective and Context:

The Mercedes-Benz brand had a problem.

The average Mercedes-Benz buyer is 54, which is five years older than both BMW and Audi buyers. More than 40 percent of Millennial buyers reported they would consider an Audi or BMW for their next car, while only 28 percent would consider a Mercedes-Benz. Worse yet, 36 percent would definitely not consider a Mercedes-Benz, compared to only 20 percent for Audi.

Enter the all-new CLA, starting at only \$29,900. From its bolder, more aggressive design language to its astonishing price point, it was expressly built for a new generation of buyer. But how could the company reach a Gen Y target who not only rejected the brand, but ignored traditional media?

The objective was to introduce the vehicle two months before its September launch, driving consideration and awareness. There were three key measures:

- 1. Positive sentiment:** as measured by social mentions attributable to the long-lead efforts. The target was at least 200,000 social mentions that would be at least 75 percent net positive.
- 2. Engagement:** as measured by active participation in the program. Across the program, the goal was to generate at least two million engagements with the brand.
- 3. Consideration:** as measured by actions and visits to the CLA-class page on MBUSA.com. The targets were aggressive: to drive at least 200,000 visits to CLA content on the site, with at least 25 percent of these visits from consumers 35 years old or younger. And the brand didn't just want browsing; it had a target of more than 50,000 completed build-your-owns and 2,000 leads (defined as contacting a dealer through the site).

Target Audience:

The target audience was Gen Y young adult males with both high income and high household income.

Creative Strategy:

When Mercedes-Benz looked at Gen Y, it noticed a fascinating tension: they were addicted to their devices while valuing experiences over things. Because their mobile phones have made it so easy to capture and share these experiences, pictures had become the language of the generation. And the platform of choice is Instagram.

The brand's approach was to trade pixel-perfect advertising for real-time mobile photography, to move cars and change minds.

It challenged five of Instagram's best photographers to spend five days behind the wheel of the Mercedes-Benz CLA. Each would document his or her trip, sharing six photos a day on their own accounts and the Mercedes-Benz Instagram accounts. The hook? Whoever got the most likes kept the CLA.

Essentially, five of Instagram's biggest influencers competed to see who could best promote the vehicle. Tim Landis (557,000 followers), Michael O'Neal (510,000 followers), Alice Gao (561,000 followers), Chris Ozer (507,000 followers), and Paul Octavious (442,000 followers) each explored a different U.S. location, capturing images of both the cars and their adventures.

The influencers were chosen not just for the quality of their imagery but also to represent a diverse range of lifestyles and viewpoints, challenging the profile of the stereotypical Mercedes-Benz driver. As they rallied their substantial fan base and took breathtaking and authentic imagery, no one was talking about "old luxury" anymore.

And while the influencers' audiences unlocked substantial organic reach, the brand amplified this by syndicating both the content and experience across other owned and paid channels.

The images were shared with Mercedes-Benz Facebook (more than two million followers) and Twitter (220,00 followers) communities, while a responsive campaign hub allowed consumers to follow the current scores of the influencers, explore the images, and track who was winning.

A campaign trailer was developed and used in both pre-roll and interactive rich media. An additional rich media execution allowed consumers to see the very latest images from the competition.

Execution

Overall Campaign Execution:

These were uncharted waters for the Mercedes-Benz brand, which had never had to target a buyer this young or adopt mobile platforms to such a degree.

Mobile Execution:

In terms of the campaign hub and paid media components, both were built to be fully responsive, with mobile-first design. The paid media unit dynamically pulled in the latest content posted to the Instagram account, meaning users on third-party sites could be part of the campaign in real time.

Results

At the beginning of 2013, Mercedes-Benz was the second largest-selling luxury automaker in the U.S., trailing BMW. Unlike BMW and Audi, it had an aging customer base.

Mobile photography delivered real results for the brand: on Instagram alone, the content achieved 87 million organic impressions.

- 1. Positive sentiment:** The brand's target was at least 200,000 social mentions that would be at least 75 percent net positive. There were 549,000 social mentions on Facebook and Twitter alone (not including engagement within Instagram), which were 90 percent net positive.

- 1. Engagement:** Across the program, Mercedes-Benz hoped to generate at least two million engagements with the brand. The photos shared during the campaign attracted just over two million likes alone. This figure was before the paid amplification program drove 170,000 visits to the campaign hub and more than 11.5 million trailer views.
- 2. Consideration:** The goal was 200,000 visits to CLA content on the site, with at least 25 percent of these visits from consumers 35 years old or younger, more than 50,000 completed build-your-owns, and 2,000 leads. In August there were 3.5 million visits to MBUSA.com, the highest in the site's history. More than one million visitors viewed CLA content, with 342,000 build-your-owns and 5,400 leads generated. The CLA accounted for 67 percent of all scheduled test drives.

Forty-seven percent of all consumers who visited the CLA-class page were under 35. By the end of 2013, Mercedes-Benz had surpassed BMW as the top-selling luxury automaker in the country, largely driven by the record-breaking sales of the CLA.

Based on this success, Mercedes-Benz has made mobile photography a key pillar of its marketing efforts going forward with the #MBPhotoPass program. Influencers are regularly given the keys to the brand's Instagram handle, creating authentic and engaging content for an audience that has grown to more than 100,000 consumers.

Within months, there were similar campaigns from both Lexus and Lincoln, suggesting that the campaign had created a new avenue for luxury automakers looking to use mobile platforms.

Source

"Take the Wheel." 2014 MMA Smarties Gold Winner Lead Generation/Direct Response/Conversion; Gold Winner Product/Services Launch; Silver Winner Brand Awareness. Brand: Mercedes-Benz USA. Lead Agency: Razorfish.