

Why Can't We Compete?

An Ethnographic Evaluation of the Brand Image

Case History

Category: *Automotive OEM*

Methods: *Qualitative Research, Ethnography, Extended Drive Experience with In-Vehicle Mounted Video Camera, In-Depth Post-Drive Interview, Online Follow-ups*

Summary

A premium division of an OEM was struggling to understand why it did not compete more effectively in the prestige automotive landscape. They needed to understand from a marketing and product standpoint what to do to improve. Decision Analyst conducted a multistage qualitative study to determine their position relative to the competition and to identify action steps for tangible improvement.



Strategic Issues

In the midst of an extremely competitive landscape where the stakes of new vehicle launches are very high, our client wanted to boost sales of its premium division products while building equity in the parent brand. They needed a fundamental understanding of what is meaningful and motivating to prospective buyers at the premium end of the market. We were to provide them with an understanding of who the buyers were and how the parent brand and its competitors were perceived and evaluated by customers. Additionally, we needed to provide them with messaging ideas and key product improvement cues that would bring about meaningful changes in perception.

Research Objectives

The goal of the research was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the luxury automotive buyer, including how they see the competitive landscape and the client's brand within that landscape.

- Research who the buyer is, how they see the world. How does luxury/prestige play a role in their lives?
- Determine where luxury automobiles fit into their lives. How do they view the luxury automotive brands?
- Identify "must have" product attributes.
- Provide marketers with a message that resonates.

Research Design and Methods

Decision Analyst designed and conducted a 4-step qualitative study. A total of 24 respondents were recruited from 2 different markets. All participants owned a luxury vehicle, but were not brand-exclusive buyers.

Step 1: In-home/Garage ethnographic interviews. The respondents were interviewed in their homes, and the interview included time with their current luxury vehicle. The interview questions focused on the presence of luxury in the participants' lives, what product attributes impacted their decision process, the context around their motives, and the rationale they used for choosing a luxury vehicle.

Step 2: Extended drive experience with in-vehicle mounted video camera. Participants were loaned the client vehicle for several days, this included an in-vehicle mounted video camera that captured "in-the-moment" reactions and impressions.

Step 3: In-depth, postdrive interviews in the home and vehicle. The focus of the postdrive interview was to explore the success and failure of the clients vehicle in term of providing luxury and to determine what attributes the client's vehicle possessed that either put it in or kept it out of their consideration set.



Step 4: Online follow-up interview to gather lasting impressions. Approximately one month later the respondents completed a series of questions about their long-term impressions of the client's vehicle. Observations of the home, garage, vehicle, personal interactions, behavior, and word usage were just as important to the analysis as were responses to the questions.

Results

The results gave the client an in-depth understanding of their target market's emotional attachment to luxury and luxury automotive brands. The client was also able to see how their vehicles fit in the luxury landscape. Armed with this insight into the buyer, the client started rethinking the way it developed luxury vehicles and made changes to multiple divisions and departments. The client's internal design team evaluated the results and made adjustments to the luxury vehicles to improve aspects where the buyer felt they were lacking on luxury. The marketing team adjusted their marketing communications and approaches to emphasize the luxury attributes that resonated most with luxury buyers.