



GMC Campaign Explores New Terrain

Innovative Video Mail Has Hard-Sell Infomercial

By Rob Williams

Pontiac GMC launched a new advertising campaign last month that is considered innovative in that it combines infomercial selling with direct mail marketing.

While video mail campaigns are nothing new to the automobile industry—many luxury cars are introduced with video mail—the campaign for the 1998 Jimmy sport utility vehicle marks the first time a video employs several principals of infomercial selling.

Among those principals: show a problem and how the product solves it, offer convincing testimonials from product users, make an offer and a call to action.

“GMC really wanted to be able to expand on what they were able to show and provide a stronger reason for the prospect to come in and test drive,” said Will Patterson, vice president and management supervisor at McCann Relationship Marketing in Troy, MI. “There was a pretty good story to tell.”

“With GMC’s move to be the upscale truck of General Motors and the trend in the marketplace of moving toward videos for upscale brands, we determined that it would really be appropriate for the Jimmy, especially since it has a number of improvements from the previous model years.”

McCann will continue to track the campaign this year, despite GMC’s decision last year to move its account to Ammirati Puris.

Unlike many car videos, GMC’s 15-minute “Love My Jimmy” program is not composed of lovely montages of cars driving through beautiful provincial settings parted by an empty road. Instead, the video urges prospective tirekickers to watch and learn how they can get free prizes from a local dealer if they take a test drive or buy a new truck.

It then demonstrates new features of the truck and how they solve problems for three different people—an artist, a realtor and a

housewife. The testimonials were drawn from a pool of Jimmy owners that had been recommended by various dealer marketing groups.

“They embody the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the typical GMC buyer,” said Tony L. Kerry, vice president of Script to Screen, the infomercial production company that shot the video for \$200,000. “The typical GMC buyer is a unique person who aspires to this more creative lifestyle.”

The price of a Jimmy can range from \$19,000 to \$29,000, depending on the features. GMC is sending the video to Jimmy owners who purchased a truck in the ‘93 and ‘94 model years. It is also sending it to new prospects who request more information



‘Love My Jimmy’ video was shot for \$200,000 by Script to Screen.

through the company’s Web site, 800 number or a business reply card.

Patterson said the company expects to mail between 25,000 and 30,000 videos this year. Each mail package includes a video, contact information for a nearby dealer and a listing of current incentive programs that may vary by region or time of year. Also included is a numbered certificate to track a prospective car buyer from the time he or she initially requests the information to the moment of a purchase decision.

“There’s a lot of benefits to it [video mail],” Patterson said. “When you’re mailing

a video, the packaging that it comes in is more substantial and is going to be a little bit more impactful. It’s definitely something that’s going to get noticed and get opened.”

He also said that video is a very engaging medium in offering demonstrations and emotional impact.

McCann oversaw a video mail campaign for another GMC brand, the Sierra, that was launched in autumn. The company offered the video in DRTV spots placed in remnant time. Patterson said that the response to that campaign was strong, although the format of the video was a more customary “extended commercial.”

GMC has not aired a half-hour infomercial on broadcast TV, as car makers Lexus and Nissan have done, but the company has considered it briefly in the past.

“I don’t know that they [GMC] are quite ready to move to that next step yet,” Patterson said. “I don’t know that the results are there to show that a broadcast infomercial is effective.”

He said that Script to Screen’s proposal to try an infomercial format was compelling to the agency and GMC.

“Most videos run about six to eight minutes,” he said. “Ours is considerably longer, but it’s a very powerful format. We thought it was a real innovative idea.”

Kerry said the video for the Jimmy was reminiscent of another show it had shot for Amway Corp. three years ago. Amway did not broadcast the show because it didn’t want to provoke channel conflict with its distributors. Instead, it gave the video to its distributors to help them sell \$800 Queen Anne cookware.

“Both GMC and Amway are additional illustrations of unique ways of using the infomercial format,” Kerry said. “There’s so much speculation about the infomercial format going away and dying. This [GMC] is a perfect example of the expansive use of the infomercial format.” ■