

TITLE OF CASE STUDY: Buick Lucerne Launch_Beyond Precision

The case study can not exceed 5 written pages in 11 point font. The case study should explain the business opportunity and objectives, the research story behind campaign development, a description of the campaign, and proof of business results (please see Entry Kit for more details). ***Proprietary data can be disguised.***

Winners are able to submit an alternate version of the case study excluding sensitive information for use in public communications.

Buick's Waning Heritage

In its prime, the Buick brand was a force to be reckoned with. An all-American source of pride, it was one of the pillars that General Motors was built on. However, as imports took over the scene in the late 20th century, the Buick tri-shield lost much of its luster. Consumer preference had shifted to imports, and Buick had not kept up with the public tastes and demands. The brand equity that Buick built by producing practical and stylish cars had become outdated and their world-class quality had been faltering for some time. As the bread and butter market of the brand became older, with the average Buick buyer being 65 years old, Buick realized that they needed to seek out a younger, more vibrant customer to supplement their loyal but aging consumer base.

A Silver Bullet

Recognizing product missteps, Buick's vehicle lineup was now undergoing a makeover. In the fall of 2005 Buick planned on introducing a vehicle that would rival luxury import sedans such as the Toyota Avalon and Lexus ES. The Lucerne was to be the crown jewel of Buick's lineup; a luxury sedan that brought back the styling and sophistication of Buick's early days. Replete with features, amenities and a level of trim not seen on a Buick in decades, Lucerne was crafted to appeal to Buick loyalists as well as to drivers of entry luxury import sedans. The purpose of Lucerne was to return Buick to the luxury market. It marked a return to Buick manufacturing cars that were well-crafted, offered a luxury experience and symbolized status and success.

But what did this mean to younger entry luxury sedan drivers?

Pursuing a younger target would be difficult because of the perception gap that existed for Buick. While quality and sleek styling were over-delivered with this vehicle, Buick's storied history had not translated to this younger audience. More than simply a bad impression, Buick was irrelevant to their lifestyles. The Lucerne presented a possible opportunity to bridge this gap and to begin to revamp Buick's reputation.

Objectives

The marketing objectives that the Lucerne was expected to fulfill were to:

- *Rebuild Buick's quality credentials.* The Lucerne launch would kick off a major brand repositioning effort for Buick. The Lucerne was expected to be launched with a brand voice designed to build Buick's credibility as a maker of well-crafted, luxury vehicles.
- *Maintain the combined volume of the two models Lucerne was replacing, the LeSabre and Park Avenue.*
- *Sell-through with less reliance on purchase incentives.* Lucerne was expected to generate demand with less 'cash on the hood' meaning more profit for Buick's parent, General Motors.

The Conquest Mindset

We knew what we had to offer with the Lucerne, but we needed to understand if this was something that would be perceived as a benefit to our new target. In order to connect with this market we needed to understand them on a fundamental level. The usual facility-based methods of research wouldn't go deep enough. We needed to reveal their attitudes toward the world not just in a sterile setting but also within their everyday home environment. The key was to engage them but also observe the interaction with their surroundings and the trophies of their success, whether it meant having conversations with them in their dens, while making lunches for their children, or while grilling in their backyards.

We made the decision to use the following research methods:

- Comprehensive in-home ethnographies with ten college-educated married couples that drove imported mid-luxury sedans, who were 35-54 years old
- One-on-one discussions providing hands-on experience with a Lucerne, probing likes, dislikes and surprises to get at the general appeal of the car

Performing in-home exploratory research was a marked departure for Buick. By asking to come into these peoples' lives without trying to sell them something we were able to have dialogue about their perceptions of the brand while observing how they related to the items of their achievement. As we were getting into uncharted territory with this target, we weren't sure what to expect. The participants took us through each aspect of the places that they relax, their home offices and their everyday routines. We also asked them about the vehicle features that are most important to them. Some essential vehicle features stood out, including quiet, quality construction, intuitive controls, "personalize-ability" (climate, seating, settings, etc.), leather seating, and safety.

When interacting with the car, many respondents saw a resemblance between the Lucerne and their own cars. Without the Buick badging many would have assumed the car was a Japanese or German import. Several features were seen as delivering more than respondents were used to, including the heated and cooled seats, the heated windshield wiper fluid, tire pressure monitoring and the rear park assist. Respondents had a wide range of positive associations for Lucerne, from stylish, to dressed up, to contemporary, to family-oriented, to smooth. Overall Lucerne was seen as a departure for Buick, a car that looked more up-to-date, more luxurious, higher tech, sportier and most importantly, more youthful than anything they'd seen from Buick.

The Bottom Line

The underlying theme that we found throughout the research was an almost obsessive attention to detail. Whether it was their professional grade Viking range, the music lessons that they decided to take late in life, or their appearance in general, there was a raised aesthetic sensibility that affected each and every decision within this target. Even when showing us their Zyliss potato peeler, which cost four times that of a regular potato peeler, they were able to rationalize the purchase decision because the incremental benefits made it worthwhile.

We named this sub-segment 'Hardworking Connoisseurs.' Hardworking Connoisseurs are intelligent, successful, discerning people who want a car that reflects their intelligence and thrives on scrutiny, with compelling attributes they can talk about when asked about their car. They are acquisitive yet inquisitive – they want the good things, but also want a lot for their money. They believe a high price usually means quality, but have a discerning eye for hype. They won't buy the most expensive item just because they can.

The good news was that the detail-orientation of the Hardworking Connoisseur target was a perfect fit with the feature-rich, intuitive design of the Lucerne. However, the underlying challenge throughout all of the research was in the Buick name. Buick was a brand that had been off the radar for so long that, for this audience, Buick had no current credentials. To them, Buick still carried the

stigma of being American, and these consumers didn't perceive a shortage of imported vehicle options. Therefore, a choice for Buick needed to be overwhelmingly supported rationally as well as emotionally. Our marketing communications needed to convey the proof that Buick, and Lucerne specifically, were worth their consideration. We needed to win these people over with the benefits of Lucerne and then arm them with what they needed to justify their decision to buy Buick.

Now, using our findings we needed to create a launch campaign that would not only identify Hardworking Connoisseurs' desires and show them that Lucerne could meet them, but that would also reintroduce Buick as a viable option.

Beyond Precision

To communicate this new information, we needed to demonstrate how Buick could bring an uncompromised, even fanatical approach to engineering excellence through the example of specific product features.

And so the idea of *Beyond Precision* was born. Beyond Precision would be the theme for Buick's campaign to launch the Lucerne. Beyond Precision was the purest expression possible of Buick's unique philosophy. A philosophy rooted in the belief that anything worth doing is worth doing obsessively. Design matters. Function matters. And, most importantly, details matter - every single one of them.

We used the word "precision" because Buick must be measurably better than its competitors (especially the imports). No room for error. No hyperbole. Just an automobile that's been crafted within an inch of its life. Buick's passion was expressed in the word "beyond." We exceed industry benchmarks. We exceed customer expectations. We even exceed our own demanding standards.

Beyond Precision was the campaign platform that would allow us to tell powerful feature/benefit stories couched in the aesthetic settings worthy of a luxury vehicle. It allowed us to communicate that Buicks are engineered with an obsessive attention to detail and that Lucerne is an impressive, feature-rich vehicle that does more for drivers and passengers.

The voice of the campaign was the voice of the collective "we" at Buick. Imagine one of our obsessive engineers. Imagine the mind that cooked up heated washer fluid. Or cooled driver's seats. An original mind. One that likes a challenge. A mind that's always questioning. Irreverent. Witty. Open to new experiences and ideas. It's a confident voice, but one that never boasts or brags. Bragging is for the insecure. We simply stated our case in simple, declarative statements, backed up by clear proof points. We were trying to displace some brands that have held a hallowed place in some people's lives for 20 years or more. We're not going to get anywhere telling a Hardworking Connoisseur that he's been wrong for half his life.

Our communications would focus on heightening Buick's quality credentials over the long term while showcasing the benefits available today on the Lucerne.

Specific tactics included –

- Showcasing the Lucerne in settings that evoked high-tech engineering and aspirational luxury
- Print and TV messaging that focused on features of the Lucerne that are meaningful to Hardworking Connoisseurs, such as heated windshield washer fluid; the quietest cabin in its class; GM’s highly regarded NorthStar V8 engine; and a voice guided navigation system.
 - For example, “buzz print” was created with an interactive flair, such as a removable library card with the headline “Where else can you get this kind of quiet?” and another with a scratch-off feature with the headline, “How would it feel not to have to use an ice scraper again?” referring to the heated washer fluid.
- Integrating positive accolades from well known publications into the online shopping experience at Buick.com
- Demonstrating Buick’s quality, technology and engineering prowess through in-dealer showroom collateral and point of sale materials
 - We provided a demonstration kit to dealers that included physical examples of the positive attributes of the Lucerne, such as a “quiet glass sound shaker” which was made of laminated glass, to help them demonstrate the benefits of the technology.

We tested the creative concepts prior to the launch to make sure we were communicating effectively. The reaction to the campaign was positive and confirmed that we were on the right track. Respondents took away a general message of “careful engineering,” and many felt that the ads portrayed Buick in a more desirable light while making them think about the car they are currently driving. The attention to detail highlighted in our TV work created the perception of a higher-end car brand and an expectation of a better driving experience. Our print highlighting the heated washer fluid presented a “great feature” that would make respondents stop and think about Buick.

The campaign launched in November 2005 in major national newspapers, and incorporated TV and online components. With a media budget of \$20 million, we purchased media properties that corresponded with our Hardworking Connoisseurs high-end media habits, which included lifestyle and finance magazines such as Gourmet, Travel and Leisure and Forbes, and TV ad placement within the Olympics, golf and morning news programs. In addition, during the daytime “Martha Stewart Living” show Martha Stewart gave away a Lucerne to an audience member, and the car was also featured on Martha Stewart’s “Apprentice,” where teams competed to create the best Lucerne showroom display for dealerships.

The Beyond Precision campaign has been a celebration of Buick’s attention to detail and a showcase for the amenities that appeal to Hardworking Connoisseurs. The campaign supported an increase in sales while initiating a shift in perceptions of Buick.

From Research to Results

Due largely to the research that we performed, the Lucerne launch managed to surpass all three marketing objectives.

Objective: Rebuild Buick's quality credentials.

RESULTS: Buick's reputation will not completely change after only six months. But the Lucerne launch has demonstrated the rebuilding process is clearly underway. According to GfK Automotive research, after six months on the market, positive opinion shift for the Lucerne jumped 26%, an increase almost twice as large as any of Lucerne's competitors during their respective launch periods. While not yet held in the same regard as entry luxury imports such as Lexus, the Lucerne has made up impressive ground for Buick in a short amount of time. In addition, Lucerne's inroads in helping Buick reclaim its luxury heritage have set the stage for future luxury vehicle launches.

(See Chart 1 in Appendix)

Objective: Maintain the combined volume of the two models Lucerne was replacing.

RESULTS: From January through August 2006, Lucerne has already sold 55,873 vehicles, 36.2% ahead of the 41,023 LeSabres and Park Avenues sold during the same time period in 2005.

(See Chart 2 in Appendix)

Objective: Sell-through with less reliance on purchase incentives.

RESULTS: Lucerne is selling well with considerably less discounting compared to LeSabre and Park Ave. In fact, average discounts on the Lucerne are half of what they were on the models it replaced.

(See Chart 3 in Appendix)

Appendix

Chart 1

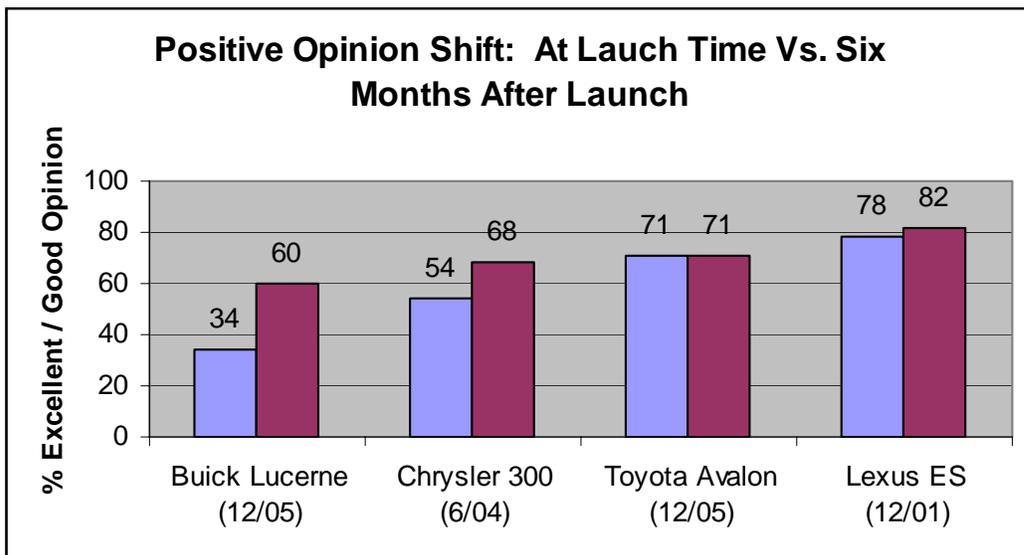
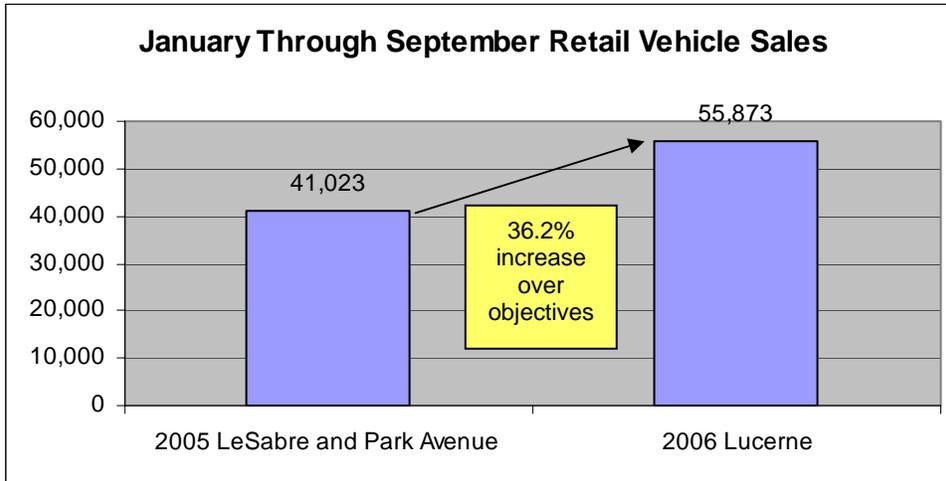


Chart 2



(Source: GM NA EZ Query)

Chart 3

