

## **Business Situation & Campaign Objectives: The Long Goodbye**

Pick-up trucks, an iconic symbol of Americans hard at work and a cornerstone of millions of American households, had seen three years of perilous decline between 2006 and 2009, during which the full-size pick up segment had lost a staggering 58% of its volume (756,434 units) from its 2006 peak (Source: RL Polk). At the end of 2010, Chevrolet's Silverado, often a segment leader, and always in a neck-and-neck race for domination with Ford's F-150 series, was an astonishing 100,000 retail units behind its archrival Ford. Additionally, when Chevrolet hired Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in July 2010, it had not advertised at the brand level in 17 years. With powerful financial restraints (post bailout) Chevrolet had not been able to provide substantial upgrades to the Silverado's interior materials, contenting or design in seven years. Those critical competitive advantages for Silverado product would not come until 2014.

In spite of the recent history, Silverado remains Chevrolet's best selling and most profitable vehicle in its portfolio. But it was in urgent need of a course correction. To do so, someone had to answer a deceptively simple-sounding, yet multibillion-dollar question: *What's the difference between a Chevy Silverado driver and a Ford F-150 driver?* Serious implications for American manufacturing loomed in the distance.

For years, qualitative and quantitative research had shown an abundance of similarities in demographics, behavioral data and psychographic mindsets between Silverado and F-150 drivers. At the product level, there were few noteworthy differences between the most popular trucks in America, though Ford had very recently introduced interior and engine innovations. At the brand level, these two legendary American automotive icons appeared on the surface as similar choices for consumers seeking the best America had to offer. At Chevrolet, the commonly held belief was that there was no meaningful difference among these consumers – choice was more or less a matter of historical brand loyalty. And yet, by January 2011, Ford had achieved an unprecedented 100,000 retail-unit sales advantage over Chevrolet.

How could this be explained and stopped? Chevrolet's challenge was to turn around sales and share declines, returning to leadership in the full-size pick up segment as quickly as possible. To do this, Chevrolet had to make Silverado more relevant to American truck buyers.

## **Research Story: Finding New Meaning for Silverado**

At the start, ethnographies, quantitative analysis of industry survey data, proprietary surveys and qualitative focus groups dating back to the mid 1990's had underpinned current understandings of the Silverado as truck-as-work-tool culture. Indeed, even recent and multiple attempts to understand the brand's steady loss of ground to competitors had given the same result: research and data reported there was little meaningful difference between the two major

players in consumers minds (Silverado and F-150) and yet Silverado was clearly losing ground to F-150 by most consumer, brand and sales measures. Something was missing. Were the data wrong? Was it the wrong data? How about the analysis—were insights lost in the methodologies used? Were consumers telling the truth? A new research paradigm was needed to untangle this vexing problem.

The first step was to see if any consumer territories had been left unexplored. To that end the research program began with a series of open explorations through cultural ethnography, qualitative focus groups, customer and brand data analysis, and quantitative surveys in a quest for the answer to Silverado's most burning question, the question at the heart of the decline: *What's the difference between a Chevy Silverado driver and a Ford F-150 driver?*

### **Goodby, Silverstein & Partners Cultural Ethnography (August 2010)**

The first foray into looking at the problem through a different lens began with a 9-day, 1500 mile, five-state road trip from Texas to Iowa to explore truck culture first hand. The journey to Silverado's successful repositioning began with two key insights uncovered by Goodby, Silverstein & Partners ethnographers during this exploration:

- Truck culture had migrated from its rural hunting and farming roots and had become embedded in the fabric of suburban men's social lives, and
- Trucks and truck culture served to opened up new, meaningful experiences with friends and family connecting people to one another, in addition to allowing drivers to get their work done and to "do-it-yourself".

### **General Motors Research and Goodby, Silverstein & Partners Research Quantitative Analysis (March 2011 – May 2011)**

Using Chevrolet's proprietary data as well as syndicated data from RL POLK, Maritz NVCS, and GfK's Automotive Imagery Assessment, an integrated client-agency team of researchers applied a new and innovative analytic approach to understanding truck consumers—Consumer Refinement Analysis. Rather than employing traditional techniques for segmentation, which had failed previously to uncover meaningful differences between truck buyer preferences, Consumer Refinement began with a model framework that first identified and *aggregated* brand and consumer *similarities* across all competitors to establish a common or "Core" brand equity portrait that was true for *all* buyers in the truck category, regardless of their brand preferences. Indeed, the sheer volume of similarities had long concealed analytically the true brand differences among the competitors, especially between industry volume leaders Chevrolet and Ford.

With the Core defined, the team began the painstaking task of analyzing each competitor using only non-core attributes to define their unique equities. The results shocked everyone: While both the F-150 and Silverado maintained the Core equity of "reliable work tool", Ford possessed a unique incremental brand equity that appealed significantly to a higher income, more educated, and generally more career and innovation oriented buyer. Silverado, on the other hand, possessed additional "reliable work tool" equity—doubling down in effect on the Core truck equity without a unique incremental brand equity to call its own.

While Chevrolet's Silverado toiled as the Reliable Work Tool, its competitors had each built a differentiating, aspirational layer to its brand.

- Ford's F150 = The Corner Office for the Successful Manager
- Dodge's Ram = The Man-Cave for the Tough Guy
- Toyota's Tundra = The Escape Vehicle for the Gentleman Trucker

The burning question had seemingly found an answer. *What's the difference between a Chevy Silverado driver and a Ford F-150 driver?* Silverado was projecting an image of “truck” and “hard work” whereas F-150 offered the tantalizing possibility of that work meaning more—more success and opportunity. Now the questions were: *What meaning could Silverado own with consumers? And, What aspiration would bring truck buyers back to the brand?*

### **Ilsa Hazelwood Ethnographic Research (May, 2011)**

Alongside the Consumer Refinement Analysis, Chevrolet went back into the field to conduct a new round of research with ethnographer Ilsa Hazelwood to explore in-depth the cultural shifts first detected in the August 2011 exploration and to update the ethnographies conducted in the late 1990s. This research confirmed

- the growing importance of family and the role of men as involved fathers and partners.
- importantly, across socio-economic classes truck owners were attaching family and social meaning to their vehicles
- compared with the 1990s research, this represented a wholesale shift away from truck as predominantly for “self” and “work”
- Silverado was a vehicle that stood for work and work was no longer a source of passion or excitement for its drivers who were the oldest, least educated, with the lowest HHI in the segment using the truck as tool – to earn a living and get by.
- Times had changed. Silverado had not captured the imagination of consumers who reflected the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy and its orientation around commuting and client-based work.

Shifting from a long-standing brand position is never an easy task for a brand. Even when the current position shows signs of deterioration, the risk that a shift might further destabilize sales could not be ignored. The research had uncovered uncomfortable truths: insights had been uncovered that challenged commonly held beliefs about Silverado and its competition, beliefs that were long internalized by the company and its dealers.

A series of qualitative focus groups (GM & GSP Research) were employed to validate and refine a new strategic position for Silverado, creative territories, and ad concepts. Research that successfully supported the transition to a new, winning brand strategy.

As the exploration yielded insights into this question, the research program shifted to quantify and confirm the more surprising and dramatic consumer findings. With support for the findings growing, the program shifted again to provide consumer nuance and detail to Silverado's new strategy (GM & GSP Qualitative Research), refine new creative ad concepts (GM & GSP Qualitative Focus Groups), test ads (GM Research), and track results in market (Nielsen Automotive, Hall & Partners, RL Polk).

### **Campaign Description**

The “There's Life to Be Done” campaign was borne entirely from the ground breaking research and analysis into the Chevrolet Silverado brand, taken on to reverse a many year decline in brand metrics, sales and share in the face of no new product improvements, and post-bail out reductions in marketing budgets. The campaign, which ran in Fall 2011, produced astounding results in short order, reversing declines and posting gains across the board.

The extensive exploratory research findings brought into clear focus the need for Silverado to acquire an aspirational layer beyond its historical role as a hard working truck for hard workers. A single powerful insight drove a dramatic repositioning strategy: Family is the most important thing in the Silverado buyer's life. This gives him a sense of purpose and dignity in life. His work is a means to that end, not what defines his sense of self. And "family" is not defined literally: it is the people with whom he has a close emotional bond (colleagues, community members—people with whom he shares a passion or interest.)

A new positioning was crafted to build on Silverado's existing product strategy "Most Dependable, Longest Lasting" which reinforced product strengths but, without a differentiating emotional layer, was struggling to win over consumers. The new strategy went straight for the heart: "There is no better father, son, husband, teacher or coach than a Silverado Man – because he realizes there's Life To Be Done".

The strategic course was set to develop a richer and deeper relationship with both Silverado owners and prospects by adding this new aspirational, emotional personality to the brand—without *softening* the masculine attributes buyers demand in their truck brands. The strategy connected Silverado's core equities (dependable, long-lasting, reliable, tough, integrity) to that part of the buyers' lives they are most focused on—providing financial and emotional support for their families. Thus, humanizing the Silverado brand.

Working with its creative agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, Chevrolet developed and launched the campaign "There's Life to Be Done," comprised of three nationally advertised spots in the early Fall of 2011 and running through December 2011: "Like Father, Like Son", "The Question" and "Reception" in addition to National Digital, Print, OOH and Radio. For the first time, Silverado's purpose, communicated in the campaign, was: "to build strong families, relationships and communities." For the first time, Silverado's creative approach would address the emotional lives of men.

The new strategic platform touches all aspects of Silverado branding from the advertising campaign, to website, social, and dealer communication. Three new television ads were created to reflect the new strategy:

- With "Like Father, Like Son" the focus is on a father's relationship with his son, showing a boy playing with his toy truck in the living room and the emotional reunion when his father returns home from work.

- In "Reception" a group of friends heads out for a weekend adventure with the goal of "losing" cell phone reception, reflecting the importance of the social bond.

- "The Question" features the Silverado owner's response to a neighbor's question (What do you do?) at the neighborhood barbecue and highlights the myriad family, social, and work dimensions of its owner.

Silverado's new positioning has also been integrated in some surprising ways. The Silverado pages on the Chevrolet website, for example, were transitioned from imagery and content reflecting the work day, to a blend of content reflecting what happens between "9-to-5" and "5-to-9" to better communicate the range and diversity of ways in which the Silverado owner shares time with those he cares about when he's not at work.

Targeted to truck buyers, mostly men between the ages of 18 and 55, the campaign media focused on general market TV with presence in premiere sporting events including The World

Series and National Football League games, and targeted in outdoors and rural genre programming.

## **Business Results**

The Fall 2011 “There’s Life to Be Done” campaign stopped a decade-long weakening of Silverado sales and share in its tracks and delivered its best sales and share gains (a full percentage point share gain) for the brand in years. Silverado’s 4<sup>th</sup> quarter turnaround contributed significantly to Chevrolet’s retail sales for 2011 which were up 19% vs. 2010 (Source: RL Polk, GM); their largest year-over-year gain in 35 years. More impressively, the campaign delivered these gains with a product that has not been substantially upgraded in several years and against a backdrop of competitors with newer products in market—including archrival Ford’s F-150.

Once the campaign was live, performance metrics from Nielsen Automotive showed that not only was the new campaign working—it was outperforming and continues to outperform all competitors:

- Strongest and significantly high breakthrough at 55% (versus 43% for the category norm)
- Strongest and significantly high message communication at 87% (versus 73% for the category norm)
- Strongest and significantly high brand recall at 30% (versus 22% for the category norm)

The campaign was capturing the attention of both domestic (36%-significantly high brand recall) and import (36%-significantly high brand recall) vehicle owners, who largely ignored the brand in the past as well as new truck intenders (38%-significantly high brand recall). More importantly, the campaign was capturing the attention of higher income intenders, registering first-ever gains with these consumers (Source: Hall & Partners, Nielsen, RL Polk).

Ad Tracking from Hall & Partners showed how the campaign was working with consumers logging gains in relevance, brand fit, and call to action behaviors including increases in consideration (32%-significantly high versus norm). The response from consumers was immediate and astounding: Silverado sales for the campaign period increased by 30%, thus cementing a full percentage point share increase for the year.

Finally, the entire campaign achieved these results with a modest budget—this was no new vehicle launch investment (which typically exceed \$100 million for a truck launch/refresh), but a “support” budget of less than \$40 million.