



TITLE OF CASE STUDY: Sonic "Firsts"

Business Situation & Campaign Objectives: Big Risk, Big Reward

Among the great thrills of research are the moments when we are able to identify, unpack and reveal a new insight for the first time. When advertising research is successful, the insight at its core persuades consumers to think and act differently about a product. But what happens when we uncover an insight in our consumer research and use it to persuade the client to think and act differently about how they advertise? With the Chevrolet Sonic, the opportunity found us. Our research insight triggered a domino effect so large, not only did it inspire an on-going series of calculated risks by the client in their approach to launching a new vehicle, but also, it traveled onwards - ultimately to create change in popular culture.

In the summer of 2011, Chevrolet unveiled the Sonic: a new, hypermodern small car. The product, coming from Chevrolet, neared contradiction. Consumer research for the Sonic that layered data from General Motors Actionable Insights, RL Polk, Maritz NVCS, Big Research and GfK Automotive Imagery Assessment identified a single, shared mindset that would connect Baby Boomers - the mass volume audience of new car buyers - with Millennials, a new and aspirational consumer target for the brand. We called this single mindset "The Getting Starteds". *Older and younger, these individuals seek out new experiences in the face of other's humdrum routines.* Our quantitative Consumer Refinement research (GSP) showed that what unites them is an energy and optimism for *authentic discovery*. We also learned that Younger Getting Starteds saw their vehicle as an extension of themselves...

An authentic discovery mindset meant we couldn't talk to people thrilled by uncertain outcomes in the usual way. No clever TV script was going to persuade them. Qualitative research (GSP Red Button) revealed younger Getting Starteds believe "everything has been done before" while quantitative research (GSP Consumer Refinement) showed "They want to be the first to know, to discover, to find and to own. It raises their social profile and possibly their estimation by others." We needed to craft a strategy that would create new thrills for these "seen it all before" consumers. Pivoting off the insight that this mindset valued risk-taking actions, Sonic was to become their "launchpod to discovery". It would be aimed at Younger Getting Starteds (the Millennials) with the full knowledge that Older Getting Starteds would be equally emotionally engaged and intrigued by the messaging.

"A Launchpod to Discovery" left us with only one way to get the new car launch right, Chevrolet was going to have to enter into the Getting Started mindset, which meant experiencing authentic discovery themselves. Together, Goodby, Chevrolet and the Sonic, set out on a series of Firsts. That meant developing new relationships with new vendors at every turn. The results were nothing short of spectacular. A Guinness World Record was set for the largest projection (for the Sonic Claw Game). Separately, the Sonic became the first car to play music, skydive and bungee jump. Sonic's anthem "We Are Young," by the relatively unknown band fun., won two Grammys and charted #1 for 7 weeks on iTunes following its :60 Sonic Anthem airing at the Super Bowl. Finally, the domino effect landed full force with 2012 sales goals, developed in the absence of precedent for a successful subcompact from Chevrolet, achieving its most ambitious goal.

Provide a summary of your campaign in 100 words or less:

In 2011, Chevrolet launched a not-so-quiet revolution with Sonic, the hypermodern small car. Coming from Chevrolet, it neared contradiction. But a new, post-bankruptcy marketing team took Sonic and entered uncharted digital and interactive waters with a radical, integrated multiple platform approach for launch. For Sonic's success, Chevrolet put research front and center at every step. What followed? Sonic entered the Guinness book of records, becoming the first car to play music, skydive and bungee jump. The car shot past sales goals to take #2 in the segment (retail sales) while its theme song became a global sensation.

Describe your campaign, include target audience, media plan, creative and running dates. (4-6 paragraphs)

Chevrolet viewed the Sonic launch as their moonshot—it had to be relevant to Millennials, or else dangerously widen the gap between Chevrolet and its competitors in effectively selling to younger buyers, the future of the brand (Maritz NVCS). The problem was that most small car sales come from middle-aged or older buyers and Chevy could not risk alienating their volume audience (RL Polk). Additionally, to meet aggressive sales goals, Chevy had to awaken consideration and sales from consumers who didn't have Sonic, an unknown brand, on their shopping list (GfK). Chevrolet needed a silver bullet; one campaign that would feel relevant and convincing to a mass, diverse audience that Sonic was the small car for them.

The hunt for a single compelling thread that could tie together the entire set of objectives and multiple consumer targets for Sonic began with a months-long research and analysis. Analysts segmented and re-segmented the data to find the elusive mindset-based target that would connect Millennials and Baby Boomers, Import and Domestic buyers. We called the target "Getting Started." Getting Starteds were taking the first steps on a new direction in life. For the younger Getting Starteds, our aspirational target, that meant getting their first apartment or first real job. For Older Getting Starteds, our volumetric audience, this mindset oriented them to find a new career or passion project in mid-life. All Getting Starteds were trying on new experiences in the face of other people's routines (Simmons). What motivated and united all Getting Starteds is their energy and optimism for discovering something new. Talking to them would mean taking risks by developing new partnerships to communicate through new, non-traditional media. Chevy was going to discover something new, too.

"Let's Do This" A Campaign of Firsts; The radical shift in Sonic's launch playbook meant rethinking the communications plan. Ultimately, the campaign was designed for the Getting Started mindset and not for the "small car category". Instead of placing the Sonic in and around "cool" content, the campaign tapped and promoted artists, musicians, robotics experts and extreme sports stars to pull the Sonic into their content. *The client let go of traditional sheet-metal shots and allowed the Sonic to become a canvas for self-expression.* Starting in October 2011, Sonic embarked on a series of spirited stunts that would last three months. The "Let's Do This" website was developed to hold the video record of the stunts and to stream live events.

Sonic's Stunts: Rather than launch conventionally, we let our target launch the Sonic. Tied to a bungee rope on top of a 100-foot platform, Getting Starteds texted and clicked 2.5M times to send the Sonic on its first jump. Sonic went skydiving — free-falling 14,000 feet from the back of a plane. Viral video and high-impact digital banners and out-of-home carried the feat. Pro skateboarder and MTV star Rob Dyrdek "kick-flipped" Sonic 360 degrees in front of a live audience in Los Angeles. (The stunt was featured in the premiere episode of his show "Fantasy Factory" on MTV.) Indie pop group OK Go drove the Sonic through a 'sound garden' of instruments to create an original music video (OKGO "Needing/Getting"). 40 Million viewers later and the Sonic was voted "Artist of the Week" on MTV. Equipped with a custom robotic arm, the Sonic created original artwork painting side by side with urban artist Jeff Soto. Sonic also recreated a virtual version of the classic arcade game "The Claw" on the side of a hotel in Hollywood, CA. One lucky player successfully hooked the virtual Sonic and then drove away with the prize: A new Chevrolet Sonic. Chevrolet took leaps in letting go of total control over how Sonic launched and allowed relevant, high-impact culture makers to steer the path forward.

With so much momentum behind it, In January 2012, Chevrolet made the call to push the TV button and sent two Sonic ads into its Superbowl lineup. The OK Go Sonic music video ("Needing/Getting") was featured pre-game, and Sonic's Anthem, a :60 spot showcasing the stunts to the soundtrack of "We are Young" by the indie group Fun., ran during Super Bowl XLVI (February 2012). Pre-super bowl qualitative

research (GSP) revealed the :60 Anthem spot had significantly higher emotional impact than the :30 Anthem. Audiences wanted the extra time to watch the visceral and emotional reactions of our creative “Firsts” stuntmen, as the lyrics: “Tonight, we are young!” rang out to their success.

With all this material, and in the spirit of reaching consumers in the throes of their discovery - Sonic presented itself as a smart opportunity to move into the gamification of the brand experience that Internet TV (iTV) mobile Apps and Xbox allowed. A new partnership with Brightline saw “Behind the Scenes”, “Build Your Sonic” and “Play Sonic Skydive” served as engaging content while consumers browsed the Direct TV guide or watched regular programs. With their interest piqued, audiences could navigate away from the conventional for a new experience with Sonic. IPSOS reports Advanced TV engagement drove a 70% lift in desired brand imagery and a 250% lift in consideration for Chevy Sonic for next NEW vehicle. For experience junkies, Wild Tangent built simple yet addictive experiences that aligned with the crazy stunts Sonic participated in “real life.” Their 2 mini-games were played 740,848 times for an average of 47 seconds of engagement time.

Additionally, a partnership with MSN resulted in MSN Beet, a “Sound Discovery” custom-branded music festival tool and content series which organically integrated the Sonic in custom videos of festival artists. The concept saw the creation of a first-ever 360 degree, 3 screen, all access coverage of artists & festivals for experience seekers. The result: there were over 29 MM impressions of Sound Discovery Festival hub and over 88,000 on the mobile site, with the average person spending 5 minutes engaged in the tool. Finally, YouTube and Facebook Sonic brand sites rounded out our digital landscape.

What was your business/campaign objective? (4-6 paragraphs)

To meet Chevrolet’s MPG goals, Sonic had to achieve significant sales quickly. The first objective was to meet an aggressive sales target of 64,000 units (2012). KPI: Increase sales to 64,000 by the end of 2012.

Sonic had to capture significantly more Millennials than the Aveo, the Sonic’s econobox predecessor, to “down-age” the brand and conquest significant numbers of import considerers. KPI: Increase 18-24 buyers vs. Aveo by 20%; Significantly increase conquest buyers vs. Chevrolet average of 44%.

To make the sale, Sonic had to shift perceptions and convince small car buyers that Chevrolet was not an irrelevant “truck” brand. KPI: significantly increase Sonic brand perceptions vs. Aveo i.e. “Youthful” and “Proud to own”.

What was your marketing strategy? (4-6 paragraphs)

The research and strategy teams combed through demographic, psychographic and life-stage data searching for common ground between Millennial and mid-life Baby Boomer (the volume buyers) consumers. The common mindset they uncovered demonstrated that consumers in both groups possessed a yearning for the feelings that come from authentic discovery.

Simmons Getting Started Younger

I enjoy taking risks 11.2% (167.7)

I like to do unconventional things 10.3 (172.2)

I like to travel the unbeaten path 18.9% (151)

I have a keen sense of adventure 18.3% (121.9)

I am adventurous 15.9% (117.2)

I have a practical outlook on life 19% (72.8)

I prefer spending a quiet night at home 16.8% (52.1)

Research showed that Millennials in particular crave the undiscovered, the never-been-done-before but fear

it's all "been done before". To be a success, Sonic needed to push boundaries to create and inspire first-time experiences. Further, Millennials respect people who do, rather than those who simply say. To breakthrough, the campaign had to be about actions - about engaging and arresting content that was extremely relevant to consumers personally - not just another car ad.

For these "Getting Started" consumers, Chevrolet developed a unified digital marketing strategy with Sonic as the launch pod to discovery. With a rally cry of "Let's do this" and a campaign of "Firsts," Sonic was well on its way to rewriting Chevy's launch playbook.

Research Story: Taking the unlikely path

Much like the Sonic campaign itself, the research took a less traditional and unlikely path. Starting with the usual market and category analyses and a consumer segmentation of small-car intenders, the research team saw quickly that the results were leading them to the old launch playbook approach. The research said "focus on miles per gallon" and "dependability". The research said small car buyers "were over age 45" and uninterested in anything but "essential transportation". They led restrictive and "financially focused" lives. They "didn't want more".

There had to be more to this story. So the research team deconstructed the segmentation and analyses looking for clues as to what would inspire. Threads were teased and focus groups held. Slowly the details of these consumers' hopes for their lives, and for their lives equipped with a new car emerged. They had plans. Taking a class, traveling to new destinations, changing jobs, going out more to socialize with friends and family. *A new car was more than "essential transportation" after all—it was the key to the next chapter of their lives. It was their key to discovery.*

The team was armed with rich detail about the target but concerned about how far the campaign tactics would have to stretch to get their attention. How far was too far? How far was enough?

To answer these questions the Goodby team conducted a social experiment called "The Big Red Button" to see how far the target was really willing to take discovery. Over the course of a week researchers lurked under cover to observe passersby reacting to a large red button situated in the middle of a busy city sidewalk. A cautionary "Do Not Push Button" sign sat adjacent.



Researchers found that while most people walked by without noticing or ignoring it, some proudly stood in front of the red button and smacked it. Subsequent interviews with button pushers confirmed they all possessed the Getting Started mindset and would be engaged by a provocative, interactive and disruptive campaign. They valued actions. They were tired of the same 'driving through leaves on a winding road' car campaigns. For a car to be a mascot for this group, it would need to actively do things and be supported by advertising rather than simply be in advertising.

But they didn't stop the experiment there. The team then took the big red button to a client presentation. Feeling a final push was needed to convince the client of the ways in which they themselves were not the target audience, and thus why the GSP team needed their trust to take new risks, GSP researchers placed the red button on a pedestal at the entrance to the client meeting. It went untouched. Not one client was curious about what would happen if they pressed it. During the meeting to get buy-off on Sonic's Discovery strategy, the clients were shown footage of the responses from the street. After much discussion we achieved agreement to lead the way forward into uncharted territory.



For Getting Starteds, real discoveries (and the brownie points for making them) happen in the niche places that only a few people know about. The campaign would not be able to depend on broadcast (it's too obvious). And despite Chevy's need for a big, quick win with a younger group, it was clear Sonic needed to deliberately begin small by engaging consumers digitally and in social media and PR.

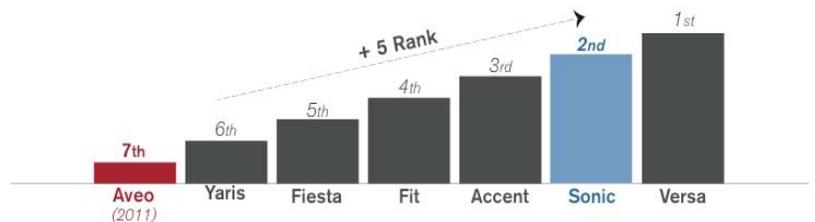
As the campaign developed, ideas were tested with focus groups, ads were copy tested, and digital touch points tracked and analyzed. At each step in the process research results helped refine the campaign elements and confirm the success of the new launch approach, providing confidence for anxious executives.

What were the campaign's business results? (4-6 paragraphs)

The Sonic launch began with identifying the authentic discovery mindset. But success really required that Chevrolet, and all of its partners, step into that mindset together with their target consumer. It meant getting a little uncomfortable as a wholly integrated digital launch was created. Discovery and a campaign of "firsts" meant trying on new experiences, building new relationships and being open to the possibility of something extraordinary happening. Given Chevrolet's previous lackluster success in the small car category, there was a justifiable anxiety over whether or not Sonic could really change the convention that Chevy couldn't do small. But as the campaign began, and as extraordinary events unfolded in a steady stream, it became clear that this was a small car that very much could turn things around.

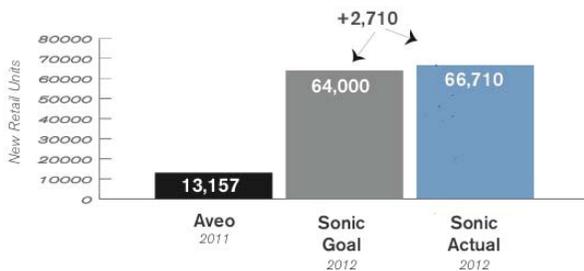
Sales: The all-digital marketing campaign featured the car being hurled from a bungee jump platform and launched from an airplane gave the Sonic a cool factor that helped its Total Sales (fleet + retail) soar to 81,247 -- nearly double the Aveo's last full sales year -- and finish as the No. 2 subcompact behind the Nissan Versa the long-standing category leader. Collectively, the campaign created a sales wave that pushed Sonic all the way to, and just past, its ambitious retail sales goal of 64,000 units.

2012 U.S. Small Car Sales Rank by Model



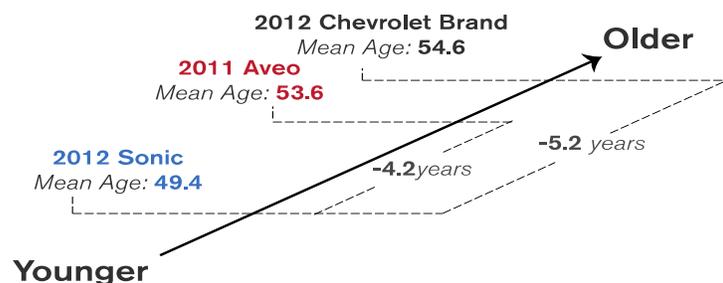
Source: RL Polk New Retail Units

2012 Sales



Source: RL Polk New Retail Units

Mean Age



Source: NVCS Study

'Down-aging': The 'Let's do this' impact on the Millennial target demographic was just as we hoped it would be. The campaign increased Millennial buyers by 65% above the levels seen for the Aveo while the average age of the buyer decreased by more than 4 years against the Chevrolet brand average. (Source: GM Sales, Maritz NVCS)

The Brand: Buyers cast off their negative perceptions of Chevrolet and left their imports for Sonic. Conquests increased significantly from 44% for the brand overall to 50% for Sonic. Perhaps most importantly for Chevrolet, Sonic was making inroads among buyers who had never previously considered a Chevy and for whom this was their first new car.

The campaign changed how Millennials viewed a small car made by the previously 'gas guzzling' Chevrolet. The digital element of the campaign undoubtedly impacted this. Over the course of the campaign, 'Let's Do This' viral videos garnered close to 30 million views (for perspective, this was double the record previously set by the "Imported from Detroit" campaign for the Chrysler 200) and earned more than 230 million impressions (Source: YouTube, Chevrolet.com, Letsdothis.com.)

Sonic's :60 Anthem TV ad, full of visceral and exhilarating "Firsts" and set to FUN's "We Are Young" song became a runaway hit. The song and Sonic's dynamic backdrops proved the perfect antidote to America's post recession gloom. Racing from #38 to #1 on iTunes following its Super Bowl exposure and most recently, running up 6 Grammy Nominations and 2 Grammys, including "Song of the Year" at the 55th Grammy Award ceremony.

All together, small car purchase intenders who have seen the Sonic campaign dramatically increased their positive perceptions of Chevy Sonic vs. those who had not see the campaign at all. The advertising could not take sole credit for Chevy's hypermodern small car – but it further accelerated positive perceptions of the Sonic among the viewing audience. All brand attributes increased by Spring 2012, but, specifically for the campaign objectives 'Youthful' increased by +180%, 'Proud to own' by +185% and 'Excellent/Good Opinion' nearly tripled at +290%. (Source: GfK). One year from launch, Consideration, by our aspirational target, the Millennials, was significantly up.

Perceptions by Age

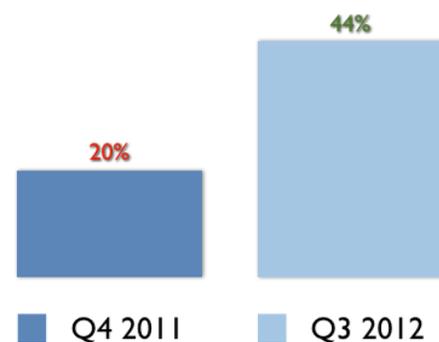
Sonic	Millennials <i>Under 34</i>	Non-Millennials <i>Over 35</i>
Familiar <i>T2 Box</i>	41%	29%
Have seen or heard advertising <i>T2 Box</i>	23%	16%
I'd be proud to own this brand/model <i>Top Box</i>	26%	11%

Finally, although it was never a goal of the campaign, the success of the Sonic has done its own small part to improve the US economy in Detroit. Sonic has been an auto success story and has restored more than 1,000 jobs in the Detroit area. The Sonic is the only small car built and sold in North America and new Chevrolet employees are working around the clock at the General Motors Orion Assembly Center in Michigan. Dealers continue to report that the demand for the Sonic outstrips the supplies available. (Source: GM)

The Sonic was, effectively, the first time that Chevrolet had been able to design and manufacture a competitive small car for the US market and the campaign cannot take credit for a better than expected vehicle from a manufacturer with little previous credibility in the space. However, the Sonic was a new small car operating at a big premium to its predecessor, the AVEO (which was still being sold at heavily discounted prices through the launch). Sonic enjoyed no special discounting.

Sonic Consideration

Millennials (18-34)
Top 2 box (definitely/probably would consider) out of 4 point scale



Source: GfK Intenders Study