

Mitsubishi

Editor's Notes

The automotive category has long been an interesting one vis-à-vis Hispanic marketing. A few manufacturers have had on-going, aggressive Hispanic marketing programs, some dating back 10 and 15 years or more. The result? Strong Hispanic market shares for these "pioneers" ...usually far exceeding their general market shares.

Until recently, the balance of manufacturers either felt that a specialized Hispanic effort was unwarranted or that the approach taken should be more cautious and conservative. Historically, a few manufacturers rejected any kind of segmented effort, feeling that specialized marketing to Hispanics was unnecessary ("My general market campaigns effectively reach those Hispanics in the market for a new vehicle"). Arguably, the Japanese manufacturers seemed to be quicker to recognize the Hispanic opportunity; perhaps as a function of their being west-coast-based (where they could observe, first-hand, the booming growth of the U.S. Hispanic segment).

This case outlines a successful first year Hispanic effort and an even more successful, expanded, second-year effort. Noteworthy was how the manufacturer's commitment (and success) grew over the two year period. Mitsubishi's ad agency (Valdés Zacky Associates, Inc.) was able to develop an integrated, multi-media effort - including the effective adaptation of the general market TV executions - for Year #1. For Year #2, a "semi-customize" approach (still partially relying on pre-existing footage) proved even more powerful.

Year #1 MARKETING EFFORT

Background

To remain competitive vs. other top Japanese and American manufacturers, and to grow sales, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America (MMSA) identified the U.S. Hispanic Market as a major area of opportunity. Several automotive manufacturers have invested heavily and aggressively in this segment for many years (with Ford, Toyota and Honda leading the way). There was much “catching up” to do. Yet, compared with general market competitive “clutter”, the Hispanic segment was much less crowded. An analysis by MMSA and their Hispanic ad agency, Valdés Zacky Associates, identified three additional factors making this a desirable segment:

- Along with the dramatic growth of the overall numbers of U.S. Hispanics, new vehicle sales to Hispanics were strong and growing.
- Mitsubishi had a strong dealer network in several of the top Hispanic markets.
- Their model lineup represented a “good fit” with the kinds of vehicles and features Hispanics were seeking out ...including the all-important element of “value”.

Marketing Campaign Objective

Starting with Model Year 1995, “Basic Stage 1” objectives were defined:

- To introduce Mitsubishi to Hispanics; raise awareness of the make and (selected) models, and, ultimately, drive purchase consideration.

Agency and client determined that the initial effort should focus on two of the largest Hispanic automotive segments, through support of two “core” MMSA models: Galant and Eclipse.

Message

For this relative “newcomer”, the marketing message needed to be simple, straightforward, yet compelling: “*Mitsubishi Motors offers reliable, safe, quality-built cars*”. Woven through all advertising/marketing executions was the slogan, “*El nuevo pensar en automóviles*” (“*The new thinking in automobiles*”).

Media

For this initial “test”, the TV spots used existing general market creative with changed voice-over and music. In addition to TV, an integrated media plan was developed, utilizing print, major event sponsorships and more.

Specific media support was as follows:

- Spanish-language (Spot) TV in top 4 Hispanic Markets in 1994 and '95. (Later on, Network TV was added, with “Spot Fill” in the four major markets.)
- Print support in national and regional publications.
- Major Hispanic events sponsorships (i.e., Calle Ocho, Carnaval Elizabeth, Fiesta Del Sol).
- Media “Added Value”, including TV “billboards”, On-air mentions, etc.
- Full-line brochures.
- Ad Planner Dealer support.

Initial Results

Results dramatically surpassed expectations. Importantly, sales results in advertising-supported markets far exceeded sales in (non-ad-supported) “control markets” ...where sales either remained flat or, at best, grew minimally.

Overall, Galant sales to Hispanics increased +51% , and Eclipse sales increased +26%.

And there was one added, equally important benefit: Dealers became excited and supportive as they experienced tremendous growth in Spanish-speaking traffic.

Year #2 MARKETING EFFORT

Background

Armed with the success of the initial campaign, MMSA decided to expand plans for Model Year '97 (MY97). Even with the encouraging start, there were still substantive issues to address, many of them identified through client and agency research efforts. Brand awareness remained low, far below key competitors'. Compared to these competitors, many Hispanics perceived Mitsubishi products as expensive. There was an added perception that MMSA lacked a full-line of vehicles.

These issues affected brand confidence; in order to “take the next big step forward”, these issues needed to be addressed. The bottom line: MMSA and Valdéz Zacky had “made a dent” via the initial program; to maintain (and accelerate) the gains, a more ambitious, aggressive effort was called for.

Objective

The marketing objectives focused on addressing the specific issues outlined above. These objectives were:

- To further build awareness.
- To emphasize that Mitsubishi offered a full-line of vehicles.
- To correct the perception that Mitsubishi vehicles were priced out-of-reach.

Creative Strategy

Unlike the previous (MY96) campaign, it was determined that this new effort should feature a creative approach more-tailored to Hispanics. For the TV executions, spots were “semi-customized”; i.e., although not totally created from scratch, they were more Hispanic-directed than the year-ago executions had been ...creatively delivering the relevant messages research had identified.

Utilizing what had been learned in consumer research studies, the spots focused on family situations at the dealership. Although, as mentioned, some pre-existing footage was used, the key goal was to deliver a relevant message, specific to the Hispanic consumer, in a “unique creative environment”.

Message

“MMSA is a maker of a full-line of automobiles, with a vehicle to fit the needs of everyone in your family ...and these vehicles are within your reach”. The campaign slogan: *“Diseñados Para Vivirlos” (“Built for Living”).*

As part of the need to demonstrate to Hispanics that MMSA offered a full-line of choices, the MY97 effort was expanded from the previous year to encompass four key Mitsubishi models; Galant, Eclipse, Mirage and Montero Sport.

Media

As with the prior year, media included ...

... Network television supplemented with local spots in the top four markets,

... Print support, featuring the “full-line of vehicles”,

... Continued on-Site involvement in major events,

... Media added value.

An important addition to the effort in 1997 was a national sweepstakes/car giveaway, featured on one of the major Spanish-language TV Networks.

Results

Building on the gains from the prior year, this follow-up effort also achieved impressively positive results. There was continued double-digit growth in all top Hispanic markets. In year-to-year comparisons, Mitsubishi Galant Hispanic sales increased another +10%, and Eclipse sales rose +32% over the prior year. Mirage sales to Hispanics were up even more dramatically.

Needless to say, being a newly introduced model, the Montero Sport could not be compared to prior year figures ...however, based on comparative proportion of population, Hispanic sales for this new sport/utility vehicle compared favorably with general market performance.

Overall, Hispanic sales (of all models) were up +11% over the previous year.