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The Best Way to Distinguish Your Brand Message



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Jumpstart Automotive Media's CEO offers his perspective on companies that are making waves when it comes to reaching auto consumers online, and those that are missing the boat.

A note from Managing Editor Jodi Harris: This week's lead feature story was written by Mitch Lowe, CEO of Jumpstart Automotive Media, a valued contributor to Driving Interactive. It's worth pointing out that at the time of publication Jumpstart is sponsoring this newsletter, but Mitch's byline is in no way a part of that sponsorship. You can find a more detailed explanation of our editorial policy [here](#) or [contact me](#) directly with questions.

Since I regularly witness the efficiency of the internet in reaching in-market car buyers, I have a natural bias towards the efficacy of online over offline media. Meanwhile, Chrysler has announced that "The New Chrysler" -- a monthlong corporate campaign telling consumers, dealers and the investment community to "Get ready for the next 100 years" (set to roll out once the sale to Cerberus Capital Management is completed) -- will initially only hit radio and newspapers. I am guessing this large campaign is meant to make an impression on in-market buyers as well as those who are concerned about Chrysler's future under its new management. Reaching beyond current in-market buyers is likely a key part of the mission; yet since the vast majority of people who are interested in cars go online to research everything from options to prices to availability; I expect the campaign will eventually go online.

While I can understand the initial instinct to use traditional media to deliver this vitally important message (after all, it has been the default media buy for the auto industry from manufacturers to RDAs to dealers for more than half a century), we at Jumpstart spend the vast majority of our time educating clients and agencies about the relative strengths of online campaigns. You see, online not only separates the wheat from the chaff, it provides a vast amount of data about buyers and their likes and dislikes: data that does not accrue with offline media buys.

Though the industry has yet to take fullest advantage of what online offers, I have been gratified some of the newest efforts by automakers to connect with target audiences through broadband media channels, podcasts and newsletters. For example: Toyota's Scion brand is expanding its 6-month-old broadband channel accessible via [scion.com](#) (targeted to young consumers who live in smaller cities but still want to know what's hip and happening) by adding a video newsletter about its events and on-the-road reports from "Slick Rick" on hot new trends. One recent emailed newsletter included a feature on a Chicago merchant selling cool sneakers.

As another example, Ford Motor Co. has teamed with iTunes on monthly podcasts that offer free, downloadable music videos at the Apple-owned site as well as at [fordvehicles.com](#). The campaign aims to build awareness of the Ford Edge crossover with 30-something, newlywed professionals. There has been more than 51,000 downloads since the podcasts started in February.

A Chrysler campaign for its 2008 Town & Country minivan that begins in October will encompass a number of Nickelodeon's online platforms, including the flagship net and Nick at Nite, as well as the online

destinations GoCityKids.com, Nickjr.com, Noggin.com and Shockwave.com. This is a tacit acknowledgement that kids can have an strong impact on which cars and vans their parents buy.

In addition, a number of automakers are tapping into the Web 2.0 space, which features participation by online communities. For example, at mycadillacstory.com, GM invites brand loyalists to send photos or essays about their Cadillacs to the site, which also offers short documentaries on celebrity owners. Earlier this year Cadillac, used national TV and print ads to promote customers and curious prospects to the site, rather than using the site strictly to raise brand awareness.

In its latest campaign, Jeep focuses on its brand's seven vehicles, and stresses the Jeep driving experience. The campaign uses billboards, bus wraps and posters in 12 major metro areas, but also includes a web page, HaveFunOutThere.com, which creates a community where Jeep owners and enthusiasts can chat and share their Jeep pictures and stories.

In Europe, Audi launched its own German- and English-language broadband TV channels last month at tv.audi.com. "We regard Audi TV as an innovative communications channel that operates like a TV channel but which also reflects the merging of traditional TV broadcasting with the internet," Audi's Hans-Christian Schwingen, told Ad Age.

I applaud these and many other online auto initiatives that reinforce that the internet is now and will continue to be, the best way to connect with car buyers.

Mitch Lowe is CEO of [Jumpstart Automotive Media](#). [Read full bio](#).