

Automotive News

Study: Car ads aren't green enough

Mary Connelly

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Auto advertisers' failure to talk green is costing them opportunities to reach mainstream buyers, a new survey suggests.

Consumers' environmental consciousness and interest in fuel efficiency outstrip the eco-messages they hear from automakers, says the study by MindClick Group Inc., a marketing research firm in suburban Los Angeles.

"There is a huge disconnect between the advertising and the amount of interest," MindClick CEO JoAnna Abrams told Automotive News.

Concerns about fuel economy and gasoline prices are whetting consumer appetites for information about hybrid and alternative-fuel

vehicles, Abrams says. Mileage and environmental performance have become major factors in vehicle purchase consideration, she says.

But according to the MindClick survey, just one of five survey respondents who bought a vehicle in the past year recalled vehicle advertising that "mentioned global warming, the environment or green" issues.

MindClick planned to release the study today, Aug. 13.

Not just 'tree huggers'

Consumer interest in green cars extends well beyond "tree huggers" and cuts across the political spectrum, Abrams says.

Among survey respondents who said they intend to buy a new vehicle, three-fifths were considering an alternative-fuel or hybrid vehicle. And of those, five out of six cited fuel economy "as one of the most critical elements of purchase consideration," the survey says.

MindClick slices the U.S. consumer market into six segments, reflecting varying concern about global warming.

Marketers should forget eco-advertising to consumers who are indifferent to or do not believe in global warming, Abrams says. These two groups represent 40 percent of survey respondents.

"It's a waste of time and a waste of money," she says.

At the same time, environmental "alarmists" - 15 percent of respondents - are already "actively engaged"

in buying green products, the survey says.

'Sweet spot'

But between those extremes, automakers are overlooking a large "sweet spot" of potential buyers, Abrams says. Consumers in the remaining three market segments are receptive to environmental messages, she says.

"Forty-five percent of a broad consumer population is something to pay attention to," she says.

More than two of five survey respondents who plan to buy a new car or truck said they recall "seeing or hearing" vehicle advertising that included environmental themes. But most of them could not remember the brand being advertised, casting doubt on the ads' effectiveness, Abrams says.

MindClick conducted the survey from May 17 to May 29. The company surveyed 1,023 U.S. consumers age 18 and older by e-mail.

Abrams says the survey sample is representative of the U.S. consumer market and has a 4.3 percent error margin.

Not very effective

MindClick showed survey respondents five print ads with eco-messages to determine whether any could change consumer perception and behavior.

The survey suggests that current advertising for hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles is "a niche message with little effectiveness," MindClick says.

An ad for the Lexus LS 600h L hybrid succeeded more than the others in "changing both perception and intended behavior," the survey concludes.

Abrams says Lexus, Toyota, Scion and Dodge are among MindClick's clients.

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Leaning green

According to a survey of U.S. consumers,

- 58% of respondents who said they plan to buy a new car or truck considered an alternative-fuel or hybrid vehicle; of those, 83% cited fuel economy as a critical reason
- 21% of respondents who bought a vehicle in the past year said they recalled vehicle advertising with a green message

Source: MindClick Group



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Green-themed vehicle ads such as this one for the Lexus LS 600h L hybrid target a huge "sweet spot" of potential buyers, according to a survey by MindClick Group.

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