

GOLD :: Sustained Success

OVERVIEW: The MINI may be small, but it has proven to be up for big challenges. Six years after its launch in 2002, it has excellent sales and one of the most distinct and potent brand images in the Canadian automotive market.



SITUATION ANALYSIS: The MINI is hard to classify. In its original incarnation it captured the essence of 1960s Britain with an appeal that ranged from roofers to rock stars to royalty. Fast forward forty or so years to the new MINI. This would have to appeal to a mindset rather than a demographic profile, but in doing so it would have to deal with a number of issues: a) the double-edged sword of familiarity. A well-loved parent brand was an advantage, but the new MINI had to create its own fresh identity; b) the threat of being a fad car. The reintroduced VW Beetle had given a salutary lesson. After a fast start, it had quickly lost momentum; c) a market that had undermined itself. The North American manufacturers were pushing 0% financing and "employee" pricing, in effect saying that cars were not worth their full price.

STRATEGY & INSIGHT: The ongoing thought has been that size is deceptive. The car might be small, but the attitude is big. MINI would also have a decidedly male persona - confident, individualistic, and non-conformist, though not monster truck macho. Overall, this was captured by the acronym FLIP - fun, legacy, individuality and performance. As for media, this has defied category conventions by avoiding big broadcast efforts. MINI's image has been built on media traditionally considered secondary.

EXECUTION: The initial campaign focused on MINI's attitude. This evolved later to performance attributes like winter driving, or product news such as the Clubman and the redesigned Convertible. The campaign signature was cheekiness: for example, billboards near radar traps had the headline "Cops hide here." Non-traditional stunts featured a new Convertible with dummy hands up in the air, looking as if the driver was in a rollercoaster. And, of course, there was a website entirely in brand character.

RESULTS: Since launch in 2002, sales have grown every year, and have consistently exceeded target. This led to 4,905 units in 2008, close to two-and-a-half times the sales in 2002.



CAUSE & EFFECT: MINI has a very small research budget, so there is no long-term tracking. However, it's clear from sales trends and informal word of mouth that the image is definitely cutting through. MINI Canada has also outperformed several international markets.

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