

Volkswagen Passat

Case Study



The Volkswagen Passat

Getting on the radar.

The Volkswagen Passat had always been a refined sedan that was a clear step above the competition in terms of styling, interior design, and driving dynamics. This is part of what made it such a great success in Europe. In the U.S., however, the Passat wasn't even on the radar. Most midsize shoppers weren't adding Passat to their consideration set because most didn't think of it as a midsize sedan. In a rationally driven segment where the Toyota Camry and Honda Accord are the no-brainer choices, Passat was undersized and overpriced. It just wasn't meeting buyers' needs.

VW had set very aggressive sales goals. In order to hit these objectives, their midsize offering needed to become a serious player, given that it's the largest U.S. auto segment and often drives overall perceptions of brands in this country.

Enter the all-new Passat. Redesigned to be larger, significantly more affordable, and designed with American consumers in mind. Its launch was critical to the brand and its sales goals matched in intensity.

Getting ahead of the game.

Another challenge VW faced was that the Passat was being launched in September 2011, at the same time as the all-new Camry, the best-selling car in the U.S. for the past 13 years. VW knew they had to get out ahead of this launch, engage consumers, and get them thinking about the Passat ahead of the Camry.

Key objectives

Generate buzz	Beat Super Bowl auto average	Increase interest in Passat
The primary objective was to get consumers thinking and talking about the new, redesigned Passat.	The secondary objective was to surpass key measures of Recall, Memorability, and Brand Communication in Nielsen's post-game study.	Since the car wouldn't be on sale for seven months, it was important to get people interested in advance.

Insight

Reaching Passat sales goals meant relying almost exclusively on competitive shoppers, since nearly no one already had the car on their shopping list. So, VW conducted focus groups across the country with this group of consumers, and learned that midsize shoppers are aspiring for something more, above and beyond simple transportation.

Still, this is an incredibly rational group. When it comes down to it, a car must meet their practical needs to get on the list – it must be roomy, reliable, work for their families, and meet their budget. But the truth is that people want a car that will help them live a richer life. These shoppers work hard because having a better life is their ultimate goal – and they see cars as something that enables them to achieve that for themselves and their families. VW learned that midsize shoppers are looking for a little bit of status – they want to reflect their success in life back to the world while being smart about it.

After consumers saw the redesigned Passat, it became clear that it is uniquely positioned to help them get more out of life. The car now competes with category leaders from a price and size standpoint, and it offers something no one else can: the status and class of a German-engineered sedan at an affordable price.

Big idea

The Volkswagen Passat can help you lead a richer life.

Bringing the big idea to life

Because Camry would be launching at the same time, it was critical to get a running start – VW needed to draw attention to the Passat and make it part of the pop culture narrative well before it hit showrooms.

VW decided to make a splash early on. They chose the biggest stage in the US, the 2011 Super Bowl, to announce the new Passat and build anticipation for its arrival seven months before it was on sale. Using a premium product feature (keyless remote start) and starring a pint-sized Darth Vader, VW developed a story in which the Passat helps enrich an everyday moment and brought it to life in a Volkswagen way – with large doses of humanity and creativity. VW wanted to capture people's hearts and minds, so that when Passat launched later in the year, they'd remember and pay attention.

The idea was to use the Super Bowl platform in an unconventional way. VW created a simple, relatable story when the standard Super Bowl recipe is just the opposite – celebrities and loud gags. In advance of the game, VW provided sneak peeks to influential press members, who in turn started teasing the spot to the public. VW intentionally leaked a :60 version of the spot on YouTube four days before it aired on TV, and then used their active social base to help spread the spot through Facebook and Twitter. Fans and followers shared and retweeted.

A :30 version of the spot then ran in the Super Bowl's third quarter. VW kept consumers engaged post-game with behind-the-scenes content online and facilitated interviews and appearances for little Darth Vader, Max. They even had little Darth meet the original Dark Lord, James Earl Jones. VW collaborated with Lucasfilm to create a custom *Star Wars* edition Passat featuring hand-drawn illustrations by legendary comic book artist Ken Lashley. The car was displayed at Comic-Con for over 100,000 attendees to view.

The media picked up on the spot, YouTube views and comments continued to climb, and the momentum kept building. Political cartoonists incorporated it into their work, consumers made their own YouTube versions, and Marvel Studios even spoofed the spot for the Thor viral movie teaser. People were engaged. Everyone was talking about it. Just as VW had hoped.

How do we know it worked?

Objective #1: Generate buzz

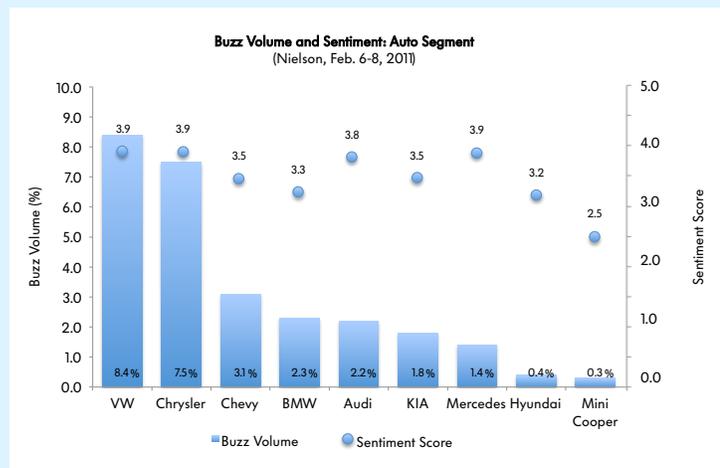
Volkswagen successfully connected with consumers and got them talking about VW and Passat:

YouTube success

- Prior to the Super Bowl, before the spot aired nationally, "The Force" gathered 12.4MM views on YouTube
- It exceeded 42MM views by the end of August 2011, just before the launch of the car
- It was the Top Viewed and Top Rated video across all categories for the month of February
- #1 Highest Rated video of all time in Auto & Vehicles Category, Worldwide
- #2 Most Viewed video of all time, Auto & Vehicles Category
- #2 Top Favorite video of all time, Auto & Vehicles Category
- It was ranked among the top 10 viral ads of all time

High buzz volume and positive sentiment

- "The Force" had the highest buzz volume of all auto ads in the Super Bowl and tied for the lead in positive sentiment



Lead the pack in post-game polls

"The Force" was rated #1 out of all of Super Bowl ads by 8 major rating services:

- #1 on Hulu, AdBowl.com, Today Show poll, BrandBowl2011.com, CBSnews.com Blog, WSJ.com poll, Spike TV poll, SuperBowl-Commercials.org

Objective #2: Beat Super Bowl auto average for key Nielsen post-view measures of Recall, Memorability, and Brand Communication

Out of 9 automotive brands and 17 auto ads measured by Nielsen during the Super Bowl, "The Force" rose to the top, ranking well above the auto average:

- #1 in Unaided Brand Recall at 32.7% and Aided Brand Recall at 57.9% among all brands
- Memorability at 75% beating the auto average of 57%
- Brand Communication at 73% beating the auto average of 65%
- Appeal at 75% beating the auto average of 64%
- Message Communication at 92% beating the auto average of 72%

Objective #3: Increase interest in Passat

Increasing interest was an important measure since the car would not be available for seven months. VW did generate interest as evidenced by Consideration and visits to the Passat Blog and vw.com:

- Pre vs. Post Consideration increased 7 percentage points from 33% to 40% for Passat
- Passat blog visits went up 127% week-over-week following the Super Bowl
- Daily unique visits to vw.com increased 52% week-over-week following the Super Bowl

Positive Volkswagen brand growth

In addition to gains for Passat, VW also saw positive movement for the brand overall following the Super Bowl. Sales grew and VW saw significant increases in key brand-level purchase funnel measures, numbers that don't tend to move much quarter to quarter:

- Sales momentum
- Purchase funnel growth
 - Unaided Brand Awareness had a statistically significant increase of 4 percentage points from 38% in Q1 2011 to 42% in Q2 2011
 - Brand Consideration had a statistically significant increase of 3 percentage points from 8% to 11%

Why are these results significant?

Because Camry was launching at the same time as Passat, VW needed to engage consumers upfront and prime them for the launch message. VW was able reach and impact a broad, mainstream audience with a car that had virtually no top-of-mind awareness, and was considered niche and expensive. Not only was this a very significant achievement in preparation for the launch of the Passat, but it also got Volkswagen into the cultural narrative again. People were talking about the brand, sharing with friends on Facebook, and spoofing the spot on YouTube.