

# SOME THINGS HURT MORE, MUCH MORE THAN CARS AND GIRLS

Hit by recession and exposed by social media, global car makers are being forced to up their game and talk to a new generation of buyers. **Giles Fitzgerald** explains why music has become the vehicle of choice in Motor City

When the first Model T Ford rolled off the production line, advertising was simple; “buy it because it’s a better car” ran the understated headline for Ford’s \$650 touring car in 1914. Fast forward almost a century and car advertising has become so steeped in cryptic visuals, oblique tag lines, unspoken sexual metaphors and wallet crippling TV ads that is now hard for the auto industry to strike a genuine connection with its intended audience.

With ad spending under review the auto sector is now seeking to entrench itself in the cultural life of potential customers through a renewed approach to music marketing.

The last few years haven’t been overly kind to the automotive industry, with the wheels falling off the luxury car market, and mid range consumers putting the brakes on expenditure amid the ongoing global recession. However, in many ways the steep decline has been something of a creative catalyst, knocking the auto sector off its pedestal and removing its somewhat stoic and historically embedded approach to marketing. “If the economy hadn’t dropped the way it did, we would have been on auto pilot and not experimented,” said Jim

Farley, group VP of global marketing at Ford, recently.

Auto manufacturers have a long history of association with music. However their use of it has traditionally been at arms length. Yes, they were among the first to pioneer the use of music as a lifestyle addition; as a route to the emotive heart behind a car purchase over the more fundamental engineering that lies under the bonnet. But for years TV ads remained the mainstay of its ‘lifestyle’ music marketing efforts, with music utilised predominately as a background feature. However, as the culture of immediacy grows and society becomes ever more reliant on social connections, auto brands are increasingly attempting to drive deeper connections with potential consumers via passion points in the ‘here and how’ as opposed to aspirations in the ‘possibly never’. The continuation of car brands merely attempting to out do one another on the extremely expensive TV ad stage is a future that few marketers relish. “TV just doesn’t have this commercial reach anymore,” said David Steele, Jaguar’s UK marketing director recently. As a result auto brands are now forging deeper alignments with music and their brand ambassadors,

as they become active and vital conduits for emotive connections with consumers opposed to mere ad decoration.

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Back in December, Audi announced that Justin Timberlake would step up as the new brand ambassador for the Audi A1. The singer has been doing his fair share of standing by the car at trade shows, but a new campaign entitled “The Next Big Thing” sees the singer engaged in a six part ‘all action’ web series complete with female co-star Dania Ramirez, hails of bullets and very fast driving. Lexus also recently opted for a noir-styled cliff-hanger with an added social media angle, as it teamed up with singer Ryan Leslie on “The Rushers’” webisode series to push the new Lexus GX SUV. Fiat too is another brand, which has actively pushed itself via music on the digital stage.

Firstly, via a playlist generating campaign on the Spotify streaming music service, and secondly, through ‘Fiat Evo Rooms’, a platform enabling upcoming acts to net one-to-one mentoring, free studio time and the opportunity to perform with some of music’s biggest names live on a new TV show. General Motors-owned car brand Chevrolet recently kick-started the ‘Chevrolet Spark Unsheduled Tour’, comprised of a series of ‘pop-up’ concerts at various venues chosen by consumers. Ford’s Lincoln brand is yet another, with a crowd-sourced promotion enabling potential consumers to vote for an emerging band to perform a song to accompany the next Lincoln ad.

As the primary Boomer car-buying consumers are pushed aside by both Gen X and the Millennial generation there is now a whole swathe of car-owners in the marketplace that auto brands have lost touch with. A study by Nissan a few years ago revealed that the younger generation perceived cars as noisy, messy throwbacks to the last century. These consumers are now looking for brands that can speak to them on their terms. It’s time to use music as a platform for dialogue with this new audience. By enabling potential (and current) drivers



music

## Singles

### Rugby Rocks

Zavvi.com has taken title sponsorship of the main stage at Rugby Rocks, the start-up festival which hosts its first event on 12 June in Richmond, London. Feeder, Just Jack (DJ), The Parlotones and Alex Gardner are all confirmed for the event, which fuses rugby 7s and music.

### Takes one to know one

After criticizing Lady GaGa for extensive product placement in her Telephone video, Rihanna has been doing exactly the same thing in her vid for Rude Boy. In a recent interview with Shigenori Itoh, vice president of watch-makers Casio said: “We are excited to have Rihanna representing Baby-G and G-Shock Mini through her music video. As a trendsetter in the fashion and entertainment world, Rihanna is the perfect example of style, originality and edge which Baby-G and G-Shock Mini proudly symbolise.” And double standards.

### JD Sports runs rap promotion

Chav store of choice JD Sports is running a promo featuring rapper N-Dubz, linking the shop’s long associated with adidas Originals. N-Dubz are putting on a one-off gig at Matter, inside The O2, exclusively for JD customers on May 27th.

### Cider drinkers unite

Strongbow has appointed Lean Mean Fighting Machine as its first retained digital agency after a pitch organised by creativebrief. The agency beat Airlock, RGA and Weapon 7 to land the account. The first activity will go live ahead of the Strongbow-supported Rockness Music Festival, in mid-June. Lean Mean Fighting Machine will be responsible for the development of the brand’s main website, as well as digital campaigns.

### Fuse and Twix in a Barn

Fuse, Madison Square Garden’s national music television network, and chocolate brand Twix are running a promo around The Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival.

*Giles Fitzgerald is head of editorial at Frukt Music*