

## **Ford applauds own workers in latest ads**

*Jean Halliday*

Ford motor co.'s new ad strategy seems to reflect a growing commitment to employee and dealer communications.

National ads now in development-the much-anticipated first work from new top marketing executive James Farley-will feature the automaker's employees and their accomplishments, said Mr. Farley, who told Ad Age the blitz is "really an employee-engagement project."

At the same time, more-retail-oriented, local ads are being created that expand on the Ford brand's earlier "Swap My Ride" push, which showed people reacting positively after driving a Ford model for a week. The new executions take a "friend-to-friend" approach, said an executive close to the automaker, in which someone who has driven a Ford for a week says how much they liked it when passing the vehicle to someone they know.

Both use the tagline "Ford. Drive One," as reported by the Wall Street Journal last week.

Like a growing number of other top marketers, such as Starbucks, McDonald's and Dell, Ford seems to have embraced the idea that its employees are key influencers and need to feel like they're a key part of the marketing process.

"We should not talk to customers until we talk to employees, because they have to believe in where we are going," said Mr. Farley, who joined Ford last fall from Toyota as group VP-marketing and communications.

To that end, the company has passed out cards to all employees that outline its corporate objectives and feature its new mantra, "One Ford."

Mr. Farley said the automaker "is interviewing everyone" inside Ford as potential ad candidates and hinted at storylines, saying Ford affiliate Mazda's recovery in recent years is "a remarkable turnaround story" and that the automaker's many dedicated insiders include a staffer who made a better crash-test dummy.

Mr. Farley declined to reveal how much media spending is planned for the effort or how long it will last before the company shifts to a more consumer-focused blitz. But he said two-thirds of the outlay will be from regional dealer ad groups, meaning heavy play for spot TV.

Mr. Farley already has changed Ford's ad-development process in two ways: by upping dealer involvement and adopting a new worldwide process with WPP Group.

WPP's JWT Team Detroit, Dearborn, Mich., is the Ford brand's lead agency. Ford's strategy parallels the Toyota brand's move in fall 2004, when it introduced the tagline "Moving Forward." At the time, Toyota officials said the campaign matched the carmaker's corporate mantra of kaizen, or continuous improvement, and would engage consumers, employees and dealers.

Ford could use more engagement. Its U.S. vehicle sales were off 5% in the first two months of 2008, following the whole industry's slippage by the same amount in what experts are already predicting may be the worst sales year in a decade.

Even so, Ford Motor is making progress in its global turnaround efforts, reporting in January a 2007 calendar year net loss of \$2.7 billion vs. a 2006 net loss of \$12.6 billion. The automaker's upcoming U.S. launches this year include the redone Ford F-150 full-size pickup, Ford Flex and Lincoln's new flagship sedan, the MKS.

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