THE VISUAL

SUPR HWY

How to market cars in the era of Instagram, image recognition, and VR
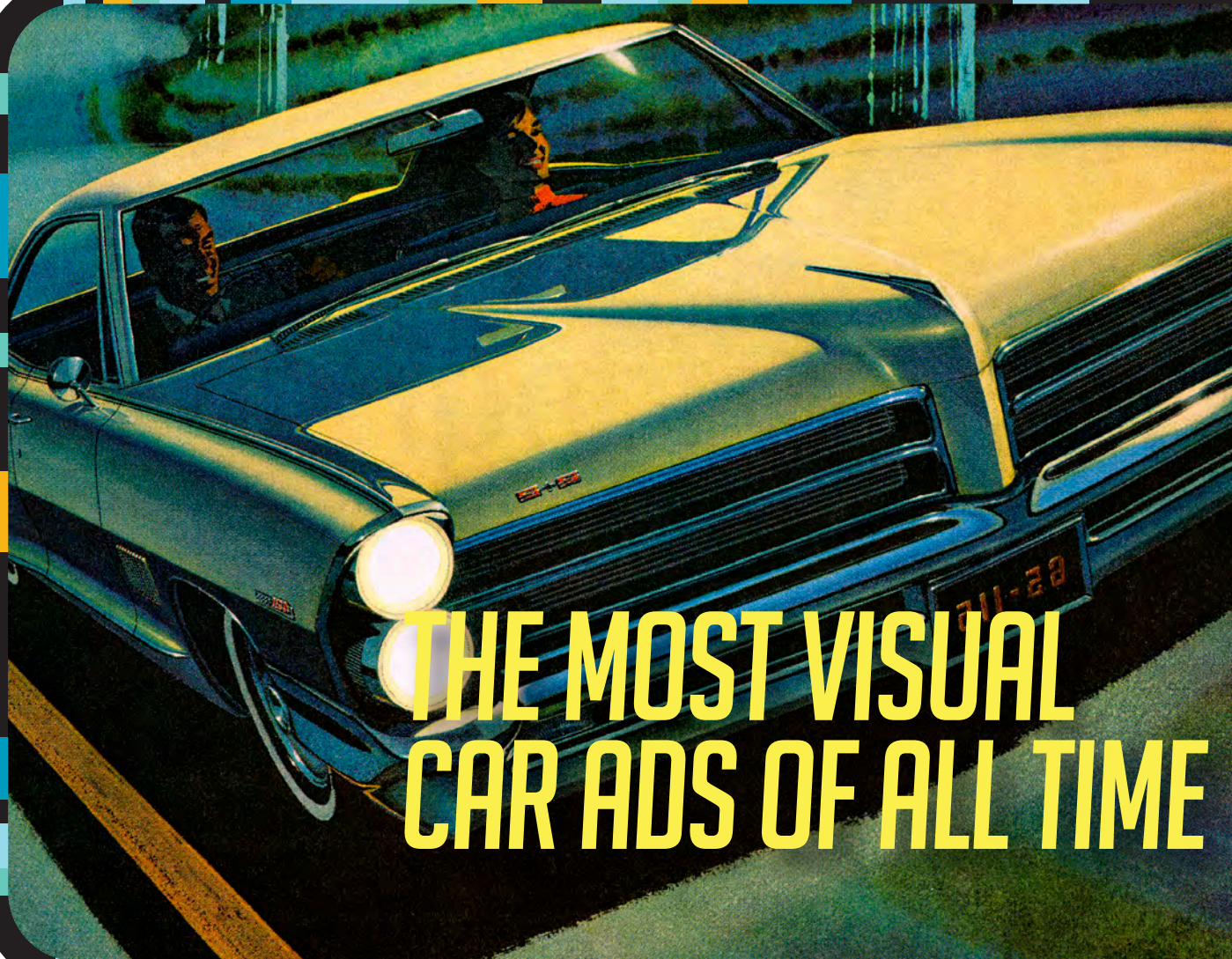
gumgum

THE VISUAL SUPERHIGHWAY

Marketing cars in a world of images, social media, and smartphone cameras

Marketing cars has always involved visuals, even as far as back as 1908, when ads for the first Model T featured the touring car from all four angles with the tagline, "Watch the Fords Go By." Fast forward a little more than a century later, and we now live in the era of the visual web, whereby 2 billion images, a good chunk of them featuring cars, are shared online every day on picture-heavy platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. But the yen for car visuals isn't happening only on social media. The number of consumers entering the search term "pictures of [automotive brand]" was up 37 percent year-over-year in November, 2015, and the 69% of people researching cars via YouTube were more influenced by online videos than by TV, newspapers, or magazines, according to Google.

It's a massive evolution of the web from being primarily a text-based medium to a visual-first medium, and it offers both challenges and opportunities for car marketers. In the following pages, we explore how everything from Instagram and Periscope to virtual reality and image recognition can help automotive brands make the most of this burgeoning shift in consumer behavior.

THE MOST VISUAL CAR ADS OF ALL TIME

EVEN BEFORE THE FIRST MODEL T CAME ROLLING OFF HENRY FORD'S ASSEMBLY LINE IN 1908, VEHICLE MANUFACTURERS WERE USING EYE-CATCHING IMAGERY TO MARKET TO CONSUMERS.

The earliest known car ad, an 1898 magazine placement for the Winton Motor Carriage Co., depicts a man and woman riding in an open-air coach in full turn-of-the-century regalia, beneath the headline, "Dispense With a Horse."

Dispense we did. And as cars have evolved over the past century, so have the images used to advertise them—from nostalgic American landscapes to unapologetically sexy scenes.
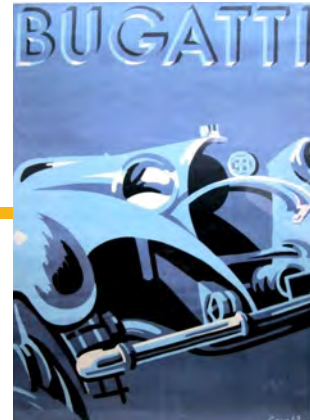
As we look ahead to the next century of automotive advertising, we also pay homage to the past. Here we've gathered the most visual car ads of all time—winners of industry awards, international acclaim, and, in some cases, the ultimate prize: a place in pop culture.

BEST IMAGERY

The Ad "Somewhere West of Laramie"
The Car Jordan Playboy
The Year 1923
The Vision Just three years after women won the right to vote, this empowering ad rode off with the imaginations of would-be cowgirls nationwide when it appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Artist Fred Cole's painting perfectly captured the alluring speed and limitless freedom of the "high, wide and lonesome"—lifting it to No. 30 among the *Advertising Age* Top 100 Campaigns of the 20th Century.

MOST FRAME-WORTHY

The Ad "Bugatti by Gerold"
The Car Bugatti
The Year 1932
The Vision How's this for standing the test of time: More than 80 years after Gerold Hunziker produced this art deco poster for French luxury automaker Bugatti, it's still in print. In 2014, an early version of the poster—which elicits the moody romance of the Bonnie and Clyde era—sold at auction for $1,625.

MOST ALL-AMERICAN

The Ad "See the USA in Your Chevrolet"
The Car Chevrolet
The Year 1956
The Vision No. 41 on the *Ad Age* Top 100 list, Chevy's mid century campaign appealed to the nation's newfound automotive independence, as tourists took to the highways en masse. The colorful, quintessentially American scenes spoke to the decade's postwar patriotism and the possibilities of the open road.

MOST MEMORABLE

The Ad "Lemon."
The Car Volkswagen Beetle
The Year 1960
The Vision Beautiful in its simplicity, this self-deprecating VW ad signaled the start of the modern advertising era. Art director Helmut Krone turned the industry on its head with a straightforward image and unconventional one-word tagline—creating the most memorable example of what *Ad Age* calls the best advertising campaign of the 20th century.

MOST SCANDALOUS

The Ad "Your Mother Wouldn't Like It"
The Car MG MGB
The Year 1973
The Vision British Leyland Motor Corporation channeled the desires of James Bond wannabes everywhere with this photograph's in-your-face sex appeal. Look beyond the braless bombshell for innuendo of a subtler kind: The theater marquee lists *Last Tango in Paris*, an X-rated erotic drama that stirred controversy following its 1972 release.

YOUR MOTHER WOULDN'T LIKE IT.

1275 cc. 94mph. 0-50 in 9.6 seconds* £987 891†

MG
MG MIDGET

MOST ENGAGING

The Ad "Hi."
The Car Chrysler Neon
The Year 1994
The Vision Chrysler said hello to a new generation of buyers with this amiable campaign, partly reminiscent of Volkswagen's pithy, one-word winner from three decades earlier. The surest sign of success: Besides selling cars, Neon's ad inspired ridicule from competitors, including a Kia "Say 'bye' to Neon" billboard.

Hi.

MOST DELICIOUS

The Ad "Piece of Cake"
The Car Nissan Xterra
The Year 2009
The Vision Sometimes the way to car buyers' hearts is through their stomachs—at least that's what Nissan wagered on with this deliciously detailed image. The campaign, by art director Daniel Djarmati, whetted appetites for adventure and earned recognition on the Clio Awards Shortlist.

XTERRA   NISSAN

MOST VIRAL

The Ad "Mom, Dad, *I'm Electric*"
The Car Chevrolet Volt
The Year 2012
The Vision Evocative design, clever copy, and a nod to evolving American attitudes turned this one-off ad in a Detroit LGBT newspaper into a social media sensation seen by more than 11 million people. Its coming-of-age storyline earned Chevy an award from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and illustrated the power of a contemporary message combined with compelling visuals.

BEST VISUAL STORYTELLING

The Ad "Skidmarks"
The Car Mercedes-Benz SLK
The Year 2014
The Vision This ingenious image tells a story without a single word—and makes the viewer do a double-take, much like the absent onlookers implied on the page. Elegant and understated, the ad by Leo Burnett London earned an entrance to the Clio Hall of Fame.
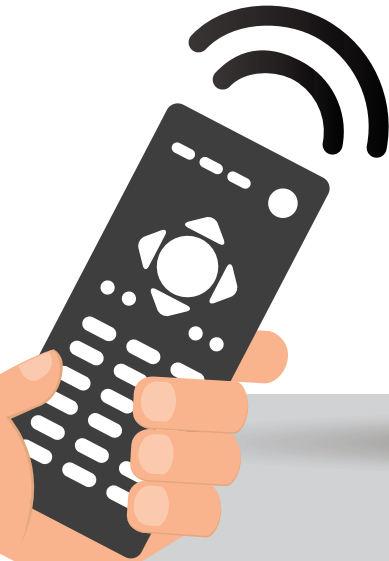

BEST BLACK & WHITE

The Ad "Letters"
The Car Fiat
The Year 2015
The Vision A bold trick of the eye drives home a serious message in this public service advertisement warning about the perils of distracted driving. The stark use of contrast creates a stimulating two-for-one image with startling effect—a successful visual technique that nabbed the campaign a Clio Gold Award.

That was then...

...this is now.

How times change:
a quick look at
today's powerful new
set of visually
driven marketing
tools in automakers'
sales arsenals.

HOW AUTOMAKERS BRAND-MARKET

OLD WAY: One-to-many and one-size-fits-all print and national broadcast advertising.

NEW WAY: Demographically appropriate display and video advertising on social platforms including Facebook and Instagram.

HOW AUTOMAKERS TARGET-MARKET

OLD WAY: Visually driven advertising that "speaks" to distinct (but still broad) market segments; e.g., automotive advertising for women's magazines is different from that seen for the same auto brand in men's magazines.

NEW WAY: Behavioral-tracking-based online advertising; real-time contextual in-image advertising directed at consumers who are already seeking out stories online that contain pictures of vehicles.

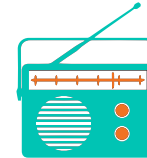## HOW AUTOMAKERS AND DEALERS SELL THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

OLD WAY: Dealership test drives.

NEW WAY: Virtual Reality test drives, such as Volvo Reality, "a full virtual reality test drive on your phone."

HOW AUTOMAKERS AND DEALERS SELL INVENTORY

OLD WAY: Advertising in the automotive sections of newspapers, classified ads, and local broadcast TV and radio.

Google AdWords

NEW WAY: Geo-targeted Google AdWords and geo-targeted social-media advertising (e.g., Toyota has done Los Angeles-targeted Snapchat ads to boost its dealers there).

IN THE BATTLE TO WIN TECH-HUNGRY CAR CONSUMERS OVER, SHOWING IS OFTEN BETTER THAN TELLING.

Until now, auto brands have mostly churned out commercials full of expansive landscapes and soothing voice-over narration. These ads often look great, but they also tend to blur together. If there's one missing element, it's an engaging look at what consumers really want from their vehicles.

In the last year, a few brands have already started to head down that path, standing out with visual marketing campaigns that introduce new tech features in ways that are both creative and informative.

Perhaps the most recent example of successful visual marketing belongs to Hyundai for its funny Super Bowl commercial starring comedian Kevin Hart as an overprotective father who uses his car's GPS tracking feature to monitor his daughter's date.

After the game, USA Today readers voted it the best Super Bowl commercial of 2015, and fueled by the national exposure, the clip now has about 15 million views on YouTube.

Hart certainly deserves credit for the clip's popularity, but the big takeaway for auto brands here is how visual marketing can make an impact organically. Explaining complex technology is a huge challenge for marketers. This spot has a strong narrative that incorporates a few nods to technology without resorting to a dry voice-over or an overbearing promotion. For example, in the beginning of the commerical, Hart briefly checks his smartwatch to track where the car is headed.

Driving home the importance of technology doesn't just have to come from expensive TV commercials. Last year, for example, Ford partnered with T Brand Studio, the *New York Times* native ad shop, on *"Sowing the Seed"*, a longform feature about how companies are pursuing manufacturing practices that are more sustainable. The report combines interactive design, text, a mini-documentary, and animated GIFs that illustrate how farm crops ultimately get turned into car parts.

In terms of visual marketing, the GIFs stand out the most since they're complemented by the #FarmToCar hashtag meant to maximize sharing and engagement.

The GIFs also provide the added benefit of a shorthand science, breaking down the ways tomatoes, peas, and coconuts become part of Ford's production process via visuals that are easy to understand. The result is a high-quality editorial project that highlights unique car features quickly and comprehensively.

Once auto brands advertise their new features for mass audiences, then comes the time to offer buyers more details as they move through the customer journey. But selecting the right medium is crucial when distributing this type of complex content. BMW is one company that has managed to excel at this approach, educating customers on advanced technology through YouTube videos with high production value.
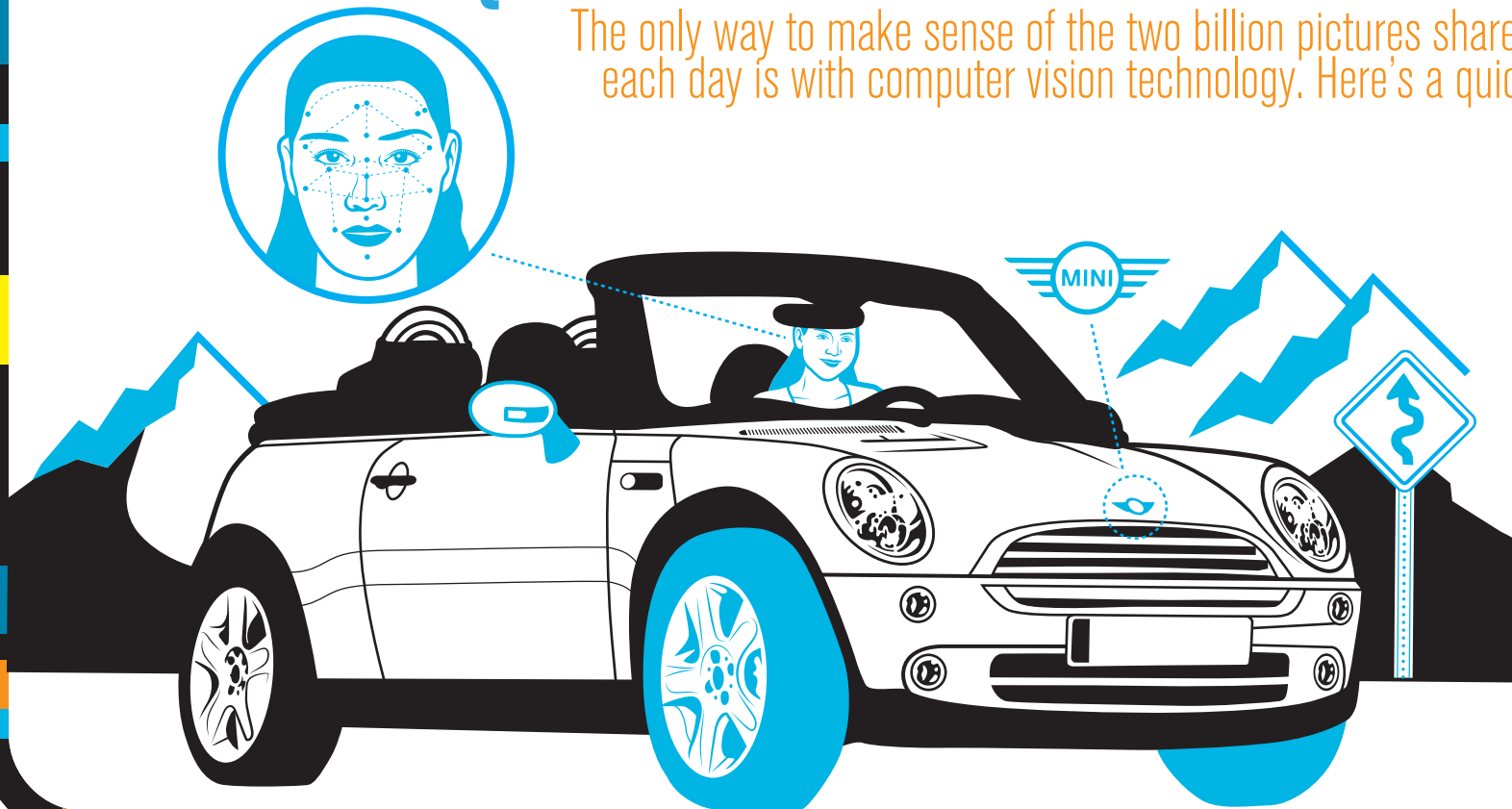
In September 2015, the German automaker released a three-minute video that unpacks all of the features of the new BMW 7 Series.

The clip is technical but also practical; between slick visuals of the car in action, it clearly demonstrates how drivers can use the new features. BMW's video has racked up over 250,000 views, making it one of the better performing clips on the brand's YouTube page. Think of it as an extended car commercial that doesn't require the excessive costs of traditional TV ad buys.
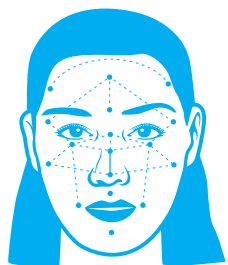
Now that proprietary vehicle technology is increasingly important to consumers, it's time for automakers to rethink how they can get people interested in their products. As this tech becomes more sophisticated, it's opening up a huge opportunity for car companies to invest in more innovative forms of visual content in their ads. The marketing potential on mediums like Snapchat, Instagram, chat apps, and other social networks — not to mention premium in-image and in-video ads -- has opened up new and effective ways for brands to tell stories about their products to the right audience in the right place at the right time. And as some of the examples above demonstrate, the visual approach attracts many viewers.

5 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IMAGE RECOGNITION
(AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR CAR BRANDS)

The only way to make sense of the two billion pictures shared online each day is with computer vision technology. Here's a quick look.

Whether flipping through slideshows of luxe leather interiors or posting selfies with their new MINI Cooper, consumers love sharing and looking at pictures of cars (just ask @SuperStreet's three million plus followers on Instagram). That's a lot for brands to keep on top of, especially considering that 80% of all images shared online lack identifying hashtags or text. But thanks to recent advances in the artificial intelligence and machine learning space—namely, image recognition—it's getting easier to make the most of the increasingly visual Web, for automotive and other brands alike. To help you understand this powerful technology, take a look at our brief guide.
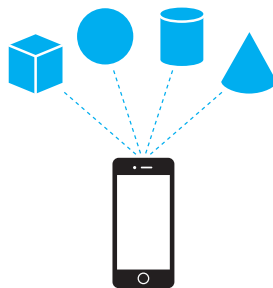
1 Here's what we mean when we talk about image recognition.

There are varying definitions for *image recognition*, which can be confusing, but basically it has to do with using computer algorithms to "glance" at images and instantly make sense of them. (There are other terms for it, like *computer vision*, but we'll stick to image recognition.) Think of an infant learning how to identify people and things—*Mama, Dada, doggy, apple, SpongeBob, Kardashian*—and then imagine that learning curve progressing at mind-boggling speed, and at massive scale, and you can begin to grasp the basics of image recognition.

2 Image recognition is about, at its core, pattern recognition.

Like babies, computers can be taught to recognize people and things by watching for patterns. All the variables that distinguish Mommy's face from Daddy's, for instance—size, shape, skin tone, the distance between eyes.—can be quantified, and then analyzed, by a computer.

Right now you're probably carrying (or reading this on) a smartphone with a built-in camera that can do a rudimentary version of image recognition in the form of very basic facial recognition. This allows the camera to autofocus on faces instead of background or foreground objects in a scene. It can do that by analyzing the pixels—the visual information translated into data—and deciphering patterns: *This stuff over here is probably a human face; that other stuff over there probably isn't.*

3 The need for image recognition is exploding because visual culture is exploding.

In its earliest days, the Internet was almost entirely text-centric. There's still, of course, an endless and ever-growing amount of text on the Web, but given the rise of smartphones with awesome built-in cameras and social media channels that make image sharing stupid-easy, millions of people are regularly letting photos do the talking for them.

On Facebook alone, users upload more than 350 million photos to the platform's servers each day. British photo-printing service Photoworld did some math and concluded that "It would take 10 years to view all the photos shared on Snapchat in the past hour" —presuming 10 seconds of viewing time per snap—and "by the time you'd viewed those, another 880,000 years' worth of photos would have been shared." Consider the other image-centric platforms in the social space, including Tumblr and Pinterest, and it's enough to make your brain (and your eyes) hurt.

There's no way mere humans could ever hope to keep up—which is why computer scientists are teaching machines how to get smarter and smarter about making sense of images.

4 Most images are completely, utterly irrelevant to you.

That's a sad fact that's just getting more and more true as our collective social-media-driven obsession with photos continues to grow. And that's where image recognition really begins to matter: Once you can start to automate the process of sorting and making sense of images using computer algorithms, then you can start telling computer systems to only show you *relevant* images.
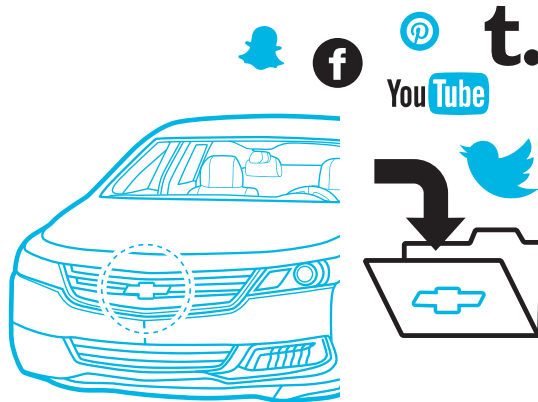
Today's image recognition technology looks for more than just faces, and can identify everything from objects (vehicles, motorcycles) and scenes (a gas station, a highway, a garage) to anatomical structure (facial features, body parts) and even logos, with gender, cartoons, and car make and model on the way.

13

5 For humans—and brands—relevance is everything.

If you're a brand, searching the text-centric web to find out what consumers are saying about you is a pretty straightforward process. Sure, you can do image searches on Google and other search engines to find visual references to your brand, but those tend to be images that have been tagged or labeled by a human—e.g., a news site's post about Chevrolet might have a photo of a Camaro in it that's been captioned by a photojournalist or an editor.

But consider a consumer who uploads a photo of his or her Corvette on Instagram, complete with a heart drawn on it, but doesn't bother to caption or hashtag it. That's one person's wordless expression of love for a brand that wouldn't show up in a traditional text-centric search. According to research, 80% of images shared online lack basic identifying text or hashtags.

And this is where image recognition can help. GumGum's visual listening technology, for example, can recognize the presence of a Chevrolet logo in an image and then automatically tag it and sort it into a virtual pile labeled, say, "All the Chevrolet-related photos on social media from the past 72 hours." Image recognition is also used to locate relevant editorial images where in-image ads can be served. In the case of car brands, that can mean "conquesting," when an ad for, say, a Chevrolet Suburban, is served within an editorial picture of a Ford Expedition headlining an article about summer road trips.

Chevrolet happens to have a relatively distinct and recognizable logo that includes a bow tie–shaped emblem; this makes it pretty easy for a computer to recognize most of the time. Where things get tricky is that this technology has to be able to make sense of objects and logos *in space*—curving a bit, or where only a part is showing. This is where image recognition increasingly begins to intersect with a branch of machine learning known as deep learning, which enables computers to teach themselves to identify more and more of what's going on in pictures, even when it isn't obvious. And the way computers learn this is by analyzing massive amounts of images; millions and millions of them. The good news is that with two billion images shared online every day, there are plenty of pictures that computers can learn from.

It's totally the stuff of science fiction, but the visual revolution online – not to mention progress in artificial intelligence–is happening for real right now. Progressive brands will make the most of it.

Independent research by GumGum

HOW IMAGE RECOGNITION WORKS

1

Also known as computer vision and machine vision, image recognition is the process by which computers scan images and video and make sense of them by discovering patterns and structure.

2

Digital images are made up of pixels, each of which carries color information that's translated into numbers. Put a bunch of pixels together and you have a pattern that can be expressed numerically (and understood and classified by a computer). The structure of these patterns is analyzed by computers in order to accurately recognize and identify what's in images and videos.
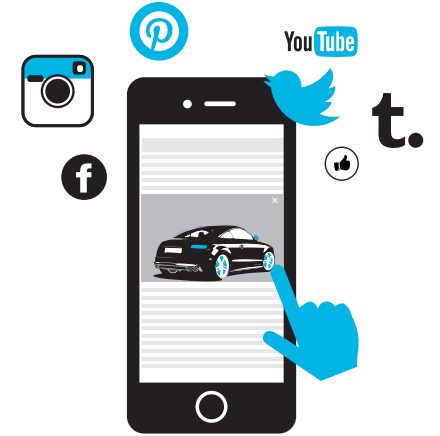
3

Patented image recognition technology by GumGum detects not only text, people, objects, faces, anatomical structure, and scenes in photos, but also logos, and soon car makes and models.

4

The algorithms are more accurate every day thanks to neural networks, an increasingly popular machine learning approach by which computers teach themselves to recognize patterns and structure more accurately by ingesting and analyzing millions of images.

5

Image recognition technology is combined with natural language processing to find relevant pictures online and serve in-image and in-screen ads that are in context with all the content around them. It's also used in GumGum Social's "visual listening" service, which helps brands find images across social media that are relevant to them, including the 80% without identifying text or hashtags.

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HOW A MEDIA DIRECTOR APPROACHES DIGITAL ADVERTISING FOR CARS

Hudson Rouge Associate Media Director Mary Tyler McNider discusses marketing strategy in a world of high-tech vehicles, social media, and visually driven ads.

1

For marketers, how are cars different from other categories such as CPG or fashion?

MARY TYLER MCNIDER: The first huge difference is the consumer cycle. A CPG brand, consumers are always shopping, and often online. Whereas in auto, consumers are only purchasing a car every four to six years or so, and they're still going into the dealership to make the transaction. So you have to think about when is your opportunity to get a consumer to choose your brand among many different competitors, not to mention what is it about your vehicle that really would get someone to trade up or switch brands. Given the long consumer cycle, it's important that car marketers get consumers familiar with their brand early on, and give them opportunities to learn more about the brand and engage with what it stands for over a longer period of time. Fewer people are going to the dealership and testing out the car first, so by the time they go there, they're probably likely to know what their options are and what they're looking for. And it becomes more important to reach them before they get to that point.

2

In a recent AutoTrader survey, 65% of those surveyed said they would switch brands to get the technology they want. Has advertising infotainment and tech features become a priority for car brands?

MTM: It depends on the brand. If you're dealing with a luxury brand, as we are, then sometimes convenience or ease of use is more important than pure technology. That said, first-to-market is always a big opportunity in terms of marketing, and digital marketing channels allow advertisers to try new things and get ahead.

3

Does digital advertising offer any advantages over other forms of advertising, particularly for new car tech features?

MTM: In digital, you have the flexibility to offer different messages or allow more time spent with different opportunities to engage. In broadcast you might have 30 seconds to portray the same message you're portraying on digital, but if somebody wants to dive in further, then digital lets you give them a deeper look and also present a more customized and personal message. This is particularly useful for new features, given the different ways that people understand and approach technology.

4

How does social media play into car marketing, particularly with its strong visual components?

MTM: Social media gives you an opportunity to engage in conversations with your consumer, whereas in any other platform, you really don't have that opportunity. So, in real time, you're getting feedback on, say, a newly launched vehicle or an existing one, both from interested consumers and not-interested consumers; the latter could be people who just happens to like the work that we created or produced in social. Plus, a lot of the executions in social media tend to feature artistic imagery, which is inherently more conversational than some of our other assets. Social media lets brands engage in conversations directly with consumers who might be considering a vehicle.

⑤ How important are visuals in digital advertising?

MTM: They're really important for luxury vehicles, or any luxury brand, just because that look and feel can really be conveyed visually and with quality photography. If you don't portray that elegance and do it well, then you lose that opportunity to show your consumers what your luxury brand is all about.

⑥ Tell us your experience with in-image ads.

MTM: All the campaigns we've run with in-image ads have had good performance in terms of how many people are engaging or choosing to learn more or whatever the execution specifically is. The main advantage of in-image advertising is that it really offers viewability. Since in-image ads are not in the standard placement— not where users expect advertising—then it becomes a bit more eye-catching than other executions. Also, they're subtle and relevant to the images, making them less of an interruption for the consumer and more of an enhancement. I think this relevance coupled with the viewability is something that in-image ads really have over standard placements.

THE SELF-DRIVING FUTURE

It isn't just cars that are going autonomous, says Amnet's associate director of programmatic media, Ben Couture.

1

Programmatic means so many things to different people. How do you define it?

BEN COUTURE: Usually when we talk about programmatic, we're talking about the automation of the media-buying process. Any type of media that is purchased through the platform that we use here at Amnet, for example, is something we consider programmatic. It encompasses everything from digital media to linear TV to audio to out of home.

2

You've run in-image ad campaigns with GumGum. What do you like about them compared to other programmatically available formats?

BC: The image recognition technology used by GumGum's in-image ad offerings gives us an understanding of what's actually in those pictures that those ads run in, and therefore gives us an idea of why the user is looking at those types of images. It's highly effective if you can infer something about why somebody is reading an article about a competitor's vehicle, and then hit those touchpoints when you bring your advertising into that image. Basically, in-image ads have enabled us to put car manufacturers' brands back in front of the user's eyes, even when attention is being focused on a competitor's brand.

3

In a recent AutoTrader study, 65% of consumers surveyed said they'd switch brands to get the technology features they wanted. Have you found this to be true?

BC: Absolutely. Personally, when I am looking for a new vehicle, the technology that is included is definitely one of the most important factors. While I still have an older Chevy Cruze right now, I'm waiting for the all-electric Chevy Bolt to come out. That would be the only new car I'd buy for a while. And it's not just because of handy features like in-car Wi-Fi or Apple CarPlay. The Bolt will go 200 miles on an electric charge, which is essentially matching what Tesla is doing, but at a better price point. That's pretty impressive and suggests that high-tech electric vehicles will be much more mass-market in the near future. Technology across the board is getting more and more important in vehicles, especially for millennials.

Why do you think that is?

BC: It's because people are more and more connected, and not just on their smartphones.

Going back to myself again: Just about everything in my house is connected online—it's the Internet of Things, so to speak. If it's growing within my house, then it should be growing in my garage as well. The more connected we are outside of our cars, the more people will expect that connectivity in their cars.

4

Cars are becoming increasingly high-tech. Do you see a future in which we're going to start seeing some ads, programmatic or otherwise, in vehicles themselves?

BC: Yes. Advertising on the dashboard probably isn't too far off, especially with the innovation around driverless cars. If you have an individual sitting in a car who doesn't need to pay attention to driving, and there's already a screen in front of them, then it seems like a perfect opportunity for additional relevant advertising. Obviously whenever impressions become available, it would be an opportunity to sell those impressions programmatically.

5

What about iBeacons, text messages, notifications, or other location-based options on mobile phones?

BC: The current capabilities of the programmatic space to understand a user's location also gives us insight into the user's intention. For example, if somebody is near a dealership, then it would probably make sense to run an awareness campaign from that dealership to individuals who are driving nearby.

6

Do you think digital channels are inherently better for promoting tech features than print, TV, or other channels?

BC: Yes, it definitely lends some credibility to the information if you've reached someone through a digital device with a message about the importance of digital features.

7

What gets you really excited about your job?

BC: I love being at the intersection of advertising and technology. Those are two passion points of mine, and in the programmatic space you can connect the most high-tech and advanced ways to buy media with the most advanced ways to reach the right people at the right time with the right message.

COLOR ME CLICKABLE

When it comes to car ads and car buying, some colors perform better than others.

Color is all around us and affects not only how we perceive the world, but also how we react to ads and make purchasing decisions. There are long-standing theories in advertising and branding that specific colors connote universal feelings and emotions. When it comes to buying a car, however, things get a little more complex.

Car color choices are not only tied to personal perception, but also to resale and market value. In many cases, a consumer may have seen and clicked on an ad with an orange or yellow car in an online advertisement (or TV ad or billboard), but when they go to make the actual purchase, they're a bit more practical and conservative.

Check out the infographic below for some statistics on how color impacts consumers' ad-clicking tendencies and buying choices for cars.

In-image and in-screen ads with blue cars are clicked on the most.
(1.03% CTR based on 13,616,815 impressions).#

For luxury cars like BMW, Jaguar, and Lincoln, in-image ads featuring red vehicles have the highest click-through rate.
(3.45% based on 4,029,159 impressions) and an impressive 80.36% viewability rate.#

In North America, white is the most popular car color for consumers-23% of vehicles sold are white.
This is followed by black, gray and silver, which account for 18%, 16% and 15% respectively. This makes for a total market share of 72% just for these four colors.*

A person's confidence level has been tied to the color of the car he or she drives.
Drivers of emerald green and dark blue cars have reported elevated levels of confidence, while drivers of red and black cars have reported more insecurity. This shatters a common perception that red cars are a sign of a more dangerous personality and that black cars are a sign of luxury and affluence.+

39% of consumers would change brands.
In other words, loyalty to color is more important to many than loyalty to car brand. **

Men are more likely to buy cars in brighter and more nontraditional colors.
Men are 25% more likely to choose orange as their top car color than women, and have also expressed increased preferences for brown and yellow cars.++
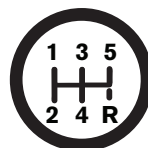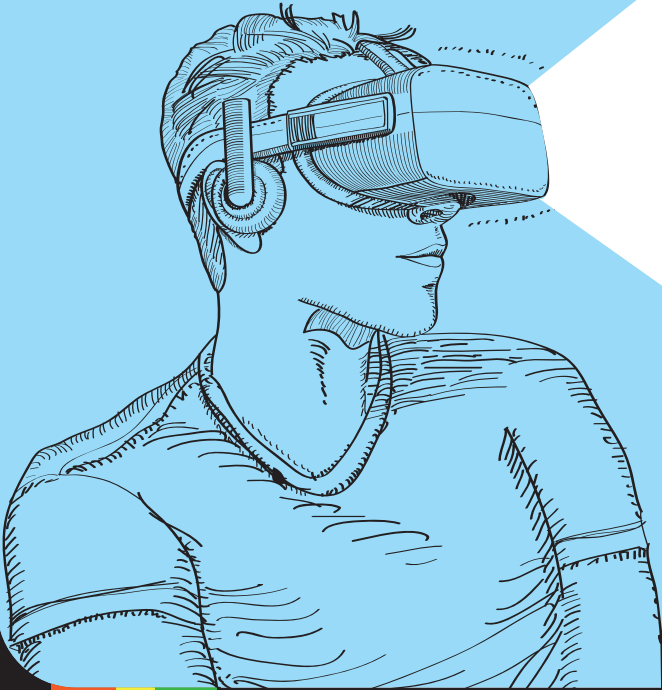
Silver is much more popular in luxury brands, accounting for 20% of luxury cars sold,
and it's the second most clicked-on color for in-image ads.# The color's popularity is thought to do with Americans' love affair with technology, since its iPhones and computers are often in silver, too.***
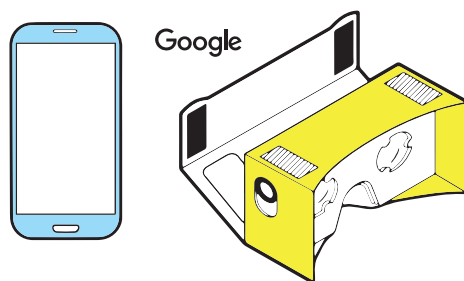
25

Selling Real Cars in Virtual Reality

Automakers were among the earliest proponents of VR, which is on its way to becoming an essential component of the purchasing experience.

With the $2 billion acquisition of Oculus by Facebook in 2014, it quickly became clear that, at least in the eyes of the Silicon Valley elite, Virtual Reality (VR) is going to become a very lucrative thing in the not-too-distant future. Gaming is an obvious application, but with the proliferation of cheap and affordable VR headsets, faster mobile broadband, and increasingly powerful smartphones, the opportunities extend far beyond tech-obsessed early adopters.

Far and away the most affordable entry point into VR is Google Cardboard, a simple, folding paper headset featuring little more than a few cheap plastic lenses. These can be had for less than $10 and, once augmented with a user's smartphone and a mobile signal, offer a surprisingly compelling taste of modern virtual reality.
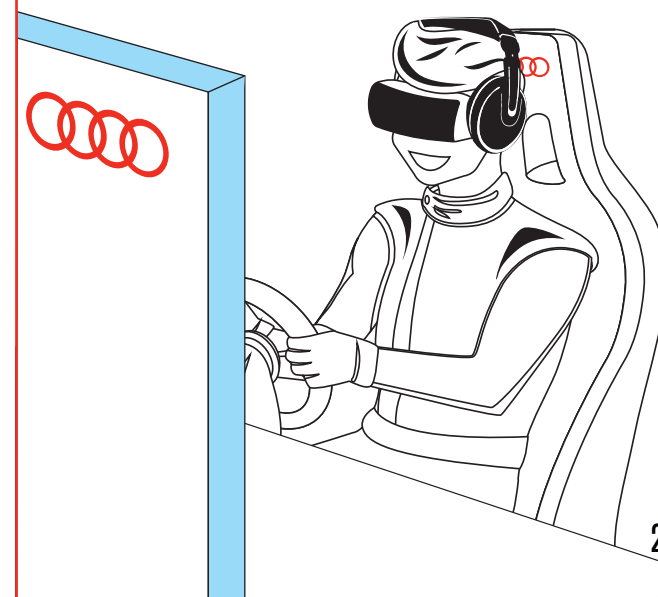

With headset prices that cheap, many savvy marketers were quick to jump on the bandwagon, especially in the automotive realm. Volvo was one of the first. To go along with the introduction of the company's XC90 luxury SUV, the Swedish auto manufacturer sourced a custom version of Google Cardboard, painted black and festooned with branding. After a debut at the Los Angeles Auto Show in 2014 (where members of the media were given cardboard headsets of their own), the headsets could be requested online by interested consumers and shipped right to their homes.

With the cardboard headset, a smartphone, and a free app provided by Volvo, users could take a virtual ride in the XC90, looking around at the posh interior within which ultimately provided a far more compelling taste than a typical online shopping portal—months before the car hit dealerships.

The MINI brand offered a similar program, launching a website where interested consumers could request a free headset, then serving them 360-degree videos showing both the inside and the outside of its cars. As anyone who has read the *New York Times* iPad app recently knows, ads that linked to this online VR experience were in abundance. With the proliferation of simple, affordable spherical cameras like the $349 Ricoh Theta, the creation of such content is no more expensive than any other vehicle-filming exercise, and the inexpensive Cardboard headsets and availability of content online via any smartphone similarly creates a low barrier of entry.
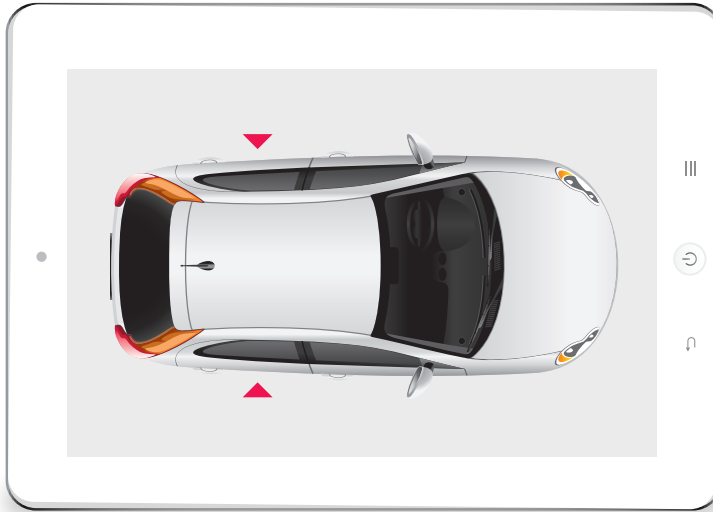
In terms of marketing opportunities, it doesn't get more visual and immersive than VR, even if it's done in a relatively bare bones way. But when coupled with higher-end kiosk implementations at dealerships—Audi demonstrated high-tech experiences with the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive VR headsets that enable potential customers to virtually customize their cars and sit in them in real time—it's clear that this new platform is going to become a bigger and bigger part of the car marketing and purchasing experience.
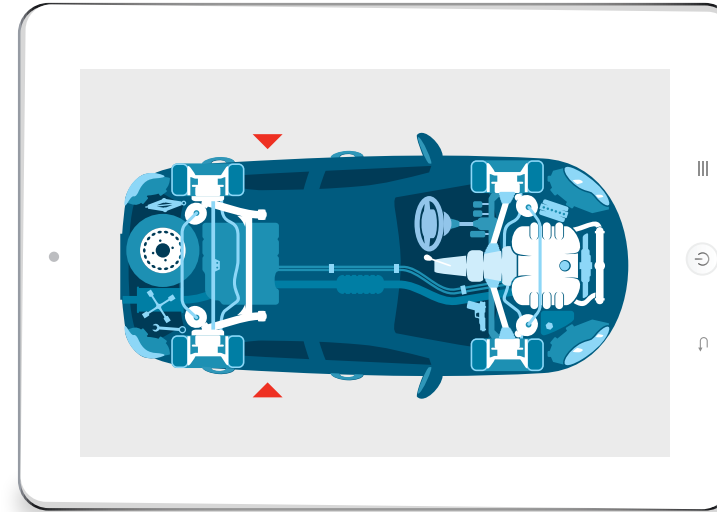

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Augmenting Reality

Move over VR. The slightly more 'realistic' AR is just as popular with car marketers.

The immersion of VR is very compelling, but for many applications, it's augmented reality (AR)—overlaying digital imagery on top of a camera viewfinder view of the real world–that is more effective.

A number of manufacturers, including Hyundai and Volkswagen, are using AR to make their vehicle manuals more interactive, allowing owners to install apps on their smartphones or tablets and be shown, for example, exactly where the air filter is beneath the hood. VW even created the full-service manual for its XL1 using AR, giving mechanics visual highlights on the car and guidance on how to perform maintenance and repairs.

Even more manufacturers are bringing that technology into the dealership. Porsche, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, and others have created AR apps that allow shoppers to get more information about various aspects of the car with pop-up information and videos that appear on their phones. Others, such as Land Rover and Ferrari, are augmenting the configuration experience. With Ferrari's, you can use a smartphone or tablet app in the dealership to apply different colors of paint or other options onto cars, seeing exactly how your ride would look long before it even hits the assembly line.

HOW TO PIQUE YOUR *Pinterest*

A PRO PINNER SHARES EXPERT TIPS ON MAKING CAR BOARDS POP ON THE WORLD'S MOST PHOTO-DRIVEN PLATFORM.

by Daniel Bear Hunley

Pinterest helps its users discover visual content. While it's true that Pinterest has a reputation for being a source of food, fashion, and beauty content, the social media network is also a rich collection of other content categories popular with Pinners. It's a mode of discovery for travel destinations, new tech, DIY guides, and even automobiles. Pinners speak of getting sucked into the site, spending hours meticulously collecting aspirational photos. The clothes they'd like to wear. The food they'd cook. The cars they'd like to drive.

The process is best explained by sharing a personal analogy.

My mother kept a large collection of shelter magazines. In order to organize pages that resonated with her, she created several binders filled with plastic page protectors. One binder was only for images of master bedrooms. Another was for living rooms. There was even a binder filled with casserole recipes, all clipped from the pages of her magazines. These curated binders were her sources of inspiration and reference.

Pinterest operates in a similar manner.

Instead of binders, users create virtual "Boards" that images are "Pinned" to. When a user Pins an image to one of his or her boards, the Pin is then shared with everyone who follows that user. Each Pin comes with a short description, and more importantly, a link that takes the user to the page where the image was found. This can either be a fashion e-commerce site, a food blog with a recipe, or a car website listing auto specs, for example.

A "Pin" on Pinterest has interesting characteristics that are different from posts on other social media channels.

Take message life span: A tweet has a relatively short life-span that can be measured in minutes. But say I Pin a photo of a new Chevrolet Volt and three people Repin it to one of their car Boards. That photo is then placed into the feeds of all of their followers, which offers more opportunities for Repins. This chain will continue, causing this message's impact to increase exponentially. A Pin's life span is theoretically infinite and not particularly time-sensitive. That's why Pins often show up in search results months and months after they were originally posted. This makes Pinterest the gift that keeps on giving.
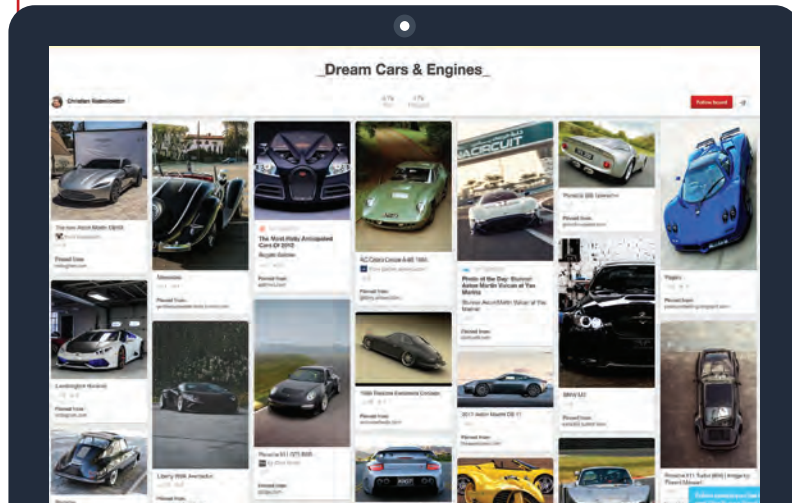

The Pinterest audience is unique in its demographics.

Women outnumber men four to one and the average age is a little over 40. The most active demographic is called "millennial moms." With women playing a leading role in 85% of auto purchases, Pinterest can be a powerful channel for promoting awareness of your brand.

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Auto companies looking at taking advantage of Pinterest should keep in mind these tips:

1 ## Image is everything.
The quality and staging of the photo is just as important as its subject matter. Cars photographed in "lifestyle" scenarios will outperform a car photographed in a showroom or on an exhibition floor. Photos shot in portrait mode will get more screen real estate than photos shot in landscape and therefore more interaction. This is considered one of the number-one rules.

1 ## Less is more.
Take a cue from the magazine industry. One stunning photograph of a subject makes more of a visual impact than 10 detail photos. The same goes for posting frequency. Thirty Pins in a row of the same subject matter is a quick way to lose followers.
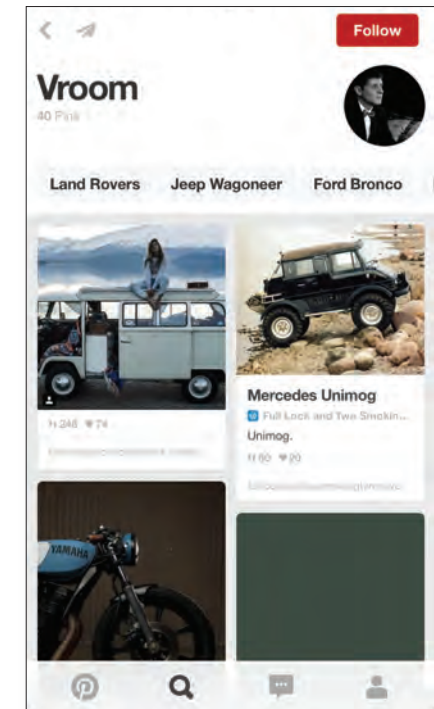
2 ## A little reconnaissance goes a long way.
Check to see if your website or brand is already popular on Pinterest, as it'll help you strategize a point of view that takes into account the most popular types of photos. For a quick way to see if people have Pinned images from your website to Pinterest, go to **pinterest.com/source/YourDomainName.com.**

3 ## Experts abound; make use of them.
Creating a presence on Pinterest can be a time-consuming project for your staff. To quickly amplify your message, consider working with a Pinterest Influencer. These individuals have built large followings of eager fans and can use their experience to guide the creation of content that will perform well with their audience.

Daniel Bear Hunley is one of Pinterest's most successful Pinners. His car Board, "Vroom," full of old-school Land Rover Range Rovers and Defenders, has more than 1.5 million followers. pinterest.com/danielhunley/vroom/

FOUR PINTEREST CAR BOARDS TO FOLLOW

Dream Cars & Engines
3.7k Pins

Aston Martin   Concept cars   Lamborghini   P...

Ghia Chrysler New Yorker

omnibusofspeed.tumblr.com

With more than 17,000 followers, Christian Radmilovick has made a name for himself by liking nice things. His rich taste for luxury is reflected in the high-performance sports cars he Pins, everything from Aston Martins to Zenvos.
pinterest.com/radmilove/_dream-cars-engines_/

The Rides
70 Pins

It's a machine, a beautiful work of art, any vehicle that you can ride or drive in. These are my favorites.

Volvo   Triumph Bonneville   Range Rover Sport

Bumblebee Camaro Ss
BlessThisStuff

Aston Martin DB9 GT Bond Edition
♪24 ♥7

The Pinterest account La Lune Creative, run by Matt Hudson, has a board called Rides that's amassed 791,000 (and counting) followers. Hudson features a wide variety of brands and cars,—everything from classics to affordable new models to out-of-this-world. It's the ideal Board for studying the characteristics of both Pins that were highly interacted with and those that fell flat.
https://www.pinterest.com/himynameis matt/the-rides/

GARAGE
256 Pins

cars, trucks & motorcycles - mostly vintage all classic

Porsche 356   Cafe Racers   Honda   Mopar

Thomas Murphy curates a great collection of both vintage cars and motorcycles on his Garage Board, followed by more than 977,000 individuals. Style is king for Pinterest success: Here, the most editorial photos –those that look like they're from a magazine shoot–are the most Repinned.
pinterest.com/therealmurphy/garage/

Honda
@honda

13.4k   6
Followers   Following

Hi, we're official Honda. Follow and pin with us #Honda.
Torrance, Calif. / automobiles.honda.com

Pins
777 Pins

Honda is one of the few brands to make use of Pinterest's potential. The automaker is off to a great start, with Boards dedicated to each of its current and throwback vintage models, but it would be wise to pay attention to what makes a successful Pin (such as posting more vertical photos).
pinterest.com/honda/

THE CAR MARKETER'S GUIDE TO *Instagram*

Fueled by an insatiable lust for all things automotive, car nuts are gravitating to Instagram for its eclectic and seemingly endless stream of four-wheeled imagery.

Online buzz suggests that young users prefer Instagram over Facebook, which is reinforced by a recent survey citing that 30% of teenagers have named the outlet as the most important social media channel (versus 23% who named Facebook). But Instagram's popularity has also come with its own challenges, namely its increasingly noisy and competitive landscape. With Instagram's 400 million users and 80 million posts per day, automotive content is easily obliterated in the mix. From plucky start-ups to established brands, a host of players are putting greater stakes into the five-year-old outlet.

How to succeed on the visual web's fastest growing social network.

by Basem Wasef

How can a brand build a meaningful Instagram presence in this age of cutthroat competition and fleeting attention spans? It takes a "just right" alchemy of artfulness and consistency, not to mention intangibles like desirability and that ever-elusive cool factor. But with an earnest and calculated approach, the medium is still ripe for breakthroughs. Consider these tips as guidelines, not absolutes, for maximizing your odds of Instagram success, and you'll be well on your way to expanding your presence within this highly relevant space.

1 Be striking.

Instagram's main attraction is arresting visual content, with verbal participation taking a backseat to the strength of the images presented. Striking, original photography works best, a challenge that means different things to different brands. It can be achieved a number of ways, including behind-the-scenes shots that humanize company heads or employees, such as the way Porsche personality Magnus Walker (@magnuswalker) features his bearded and dreadlocked signature look in photos with cars. Archive photos can also be re-appropriated with a #ThrowbackThursday (or #TBT) hashtag, creating a sense of novelty and nostalgia that transcends trendiness. Tapping into the past can appear endearing even for big companies, as it does for Ford (@ford), which leverages decades-old shots of everything from a 1930s Model a to a brand-spaking-new Shelby GT-H to renew interest in its current model lineup.

2 Create a signature.

The key to differentiation within the automotive realm is the exploitation of what is unique about your brand, and the idea of creating an aura of cool is all about individuality. Though most automotive brands imbue their Instagram accounts with a serious tone and polished, glossy imagery, others often sprinkle their straight-ahead social media presence with playful posts that point to the lighter side of car enthusiasm. Consider KIA's usage of NBA personality and brand spokesman LeBron James, whose portraits are used to ironic (and comedic) effect, or the automaker's #addpizzazz campaign, which plays up the theme of automotive personality through creative use of loudly colored socks.
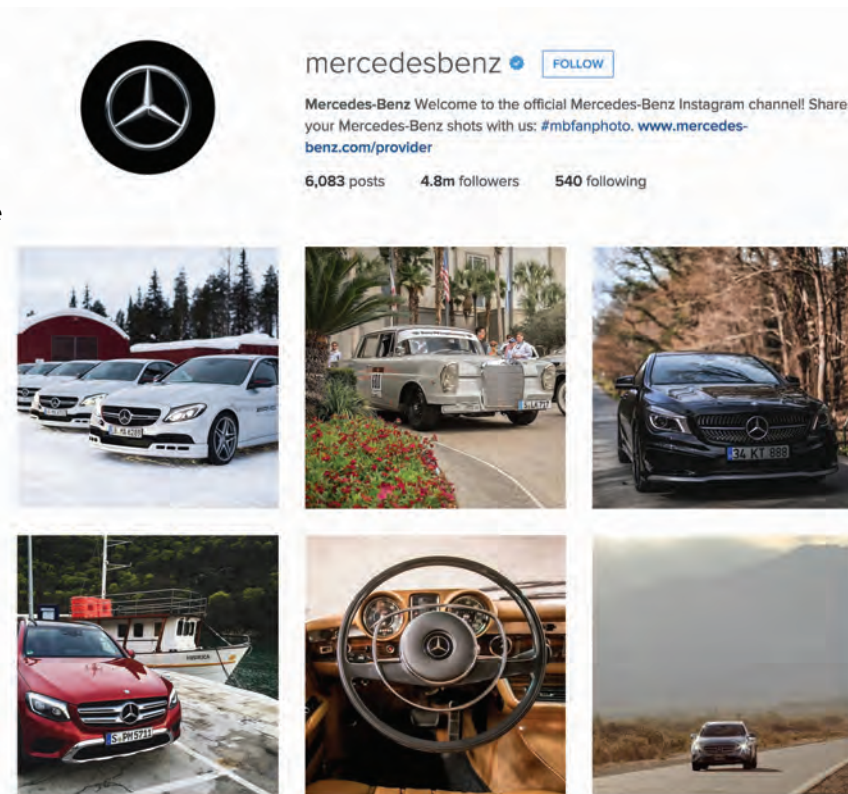
Regardless of whether your campaign is serious or cheeky, consider adopting a distinctive, inspirational, or evocative hashtag and making it your own (see Petrolicious's #DriveTastefully, and BMW's #SheerDrivingPleasure). But don't overdo it with hashtags, as sprinkling the hashmarks like birdseed can convey a sense of cheapness and desperation.

3 Team up.

Don't get greedy when it comes to the Instagram limelight. Sharing the spotlight with the right personalities can not only amplify your brand's cachet and broaden its exposure, but it can also ease the burden of content creation. One tried-and-true 21st-century collaboration tool is the account takeover. By handing over the reins to a trusted personality for a predetermined period of time, brands can expand their reach and lure a fresh batch of followers.

One manufacturer that has fared particularly well with this practice is Mercedes-Benz; the luxury automaker has regularly partnered with everyone from pro athletes to fashion and culinary personalities with the goal of stoking interest in their vehicles and attracting the attention of the coveted millennial demographic. The takeovers, which have utilized personalities like golf star Rickie Fowler by putting them in Mercedes-Benzes for cross-country drives, has helped push Mercedes to become the second-most-popular automotive account on Instagram, with 4.5 million followers.

mercedesbenz ✓ FOLLOW

Mercedes-Benz Welcome to the official Mercedes-Benz Instagram channel! Share your Mercedes-Benz shots with us: #mbfanphoto. www.mercedes-benz.com/provider

6,083 posts   4.8m followers   540 following

4 Humanize.

Though its aesthetic aspects are alluring to hardcore enthusiasts, sheet metal can have a way of alienating the non-core audience. Integrating the human element into Instagram can be tricky, especially given the constraints of the automotive world. But when executed well, the results are exceptional, as they were with Mercedes-Benz's Jon Hamm. The *Mad Men* actor brought an air of gravitas to the German manufacturer as its ad voiceover talent who posted frequently about the brand on Instagram. Similarly, Porsche's Patrick Dempsey delivered an air of leading man glamour by racing the German sports cars at Le Mans (a perfect subject for constant Instagram posts by both actor and brand). Car fanatics may by irrevocably attracted to the nuts and bolts of a car's physical presence, but putting a face to a brand has the power of stirring an emotional connection that could not have otherwise been sparked by a vehicle.

5 AUTOMOTIVE INSTAGRAM BRANDS TO WATCH

Mercedes-Benz
(@mercedesbenz; 4.5m followers)
Mercedes is chasing BMW for the top spot in Instagram popularity, challenging the Bavarian brand with an eclectic combination of new-product shots, owner-submitted photos, and celebrity/photographer takeovers. The multi-pronged approach lends the account a more diversified, and engaging tone.

1

BMW
(@bmw; 5.7m followers)
BMW's consistent levels of polish and production value have helped secure its status as the top automotive site on Instagram. From warmly lit shots of classic Bimmers to high-concept photos of current model cars, BMW goes the extra mile to make its cars look lustworthy.

2

Formula 1
(@f1; 790k followers)
Few automotive entities have humanized their brand as effectively as the top level of racing: Formula 1. By revealing the faces of everyone from racers to pit crew members in reportage-style candids, F1 brings a refreshing level of relatability to the sport.

2

It's White Noise
(@itswhitenoise; 142k followers)
Thanks to nearly 300,000 hashtags associated with its handle, It's White Noise (@itswhitenoise) has inspired legions of followers through frequent posts of exotics and classics. By featuring an eclectic array of drool-worthy rides, this account touches upon every niche while keeping a finger on the pulse of the enthusiast world.
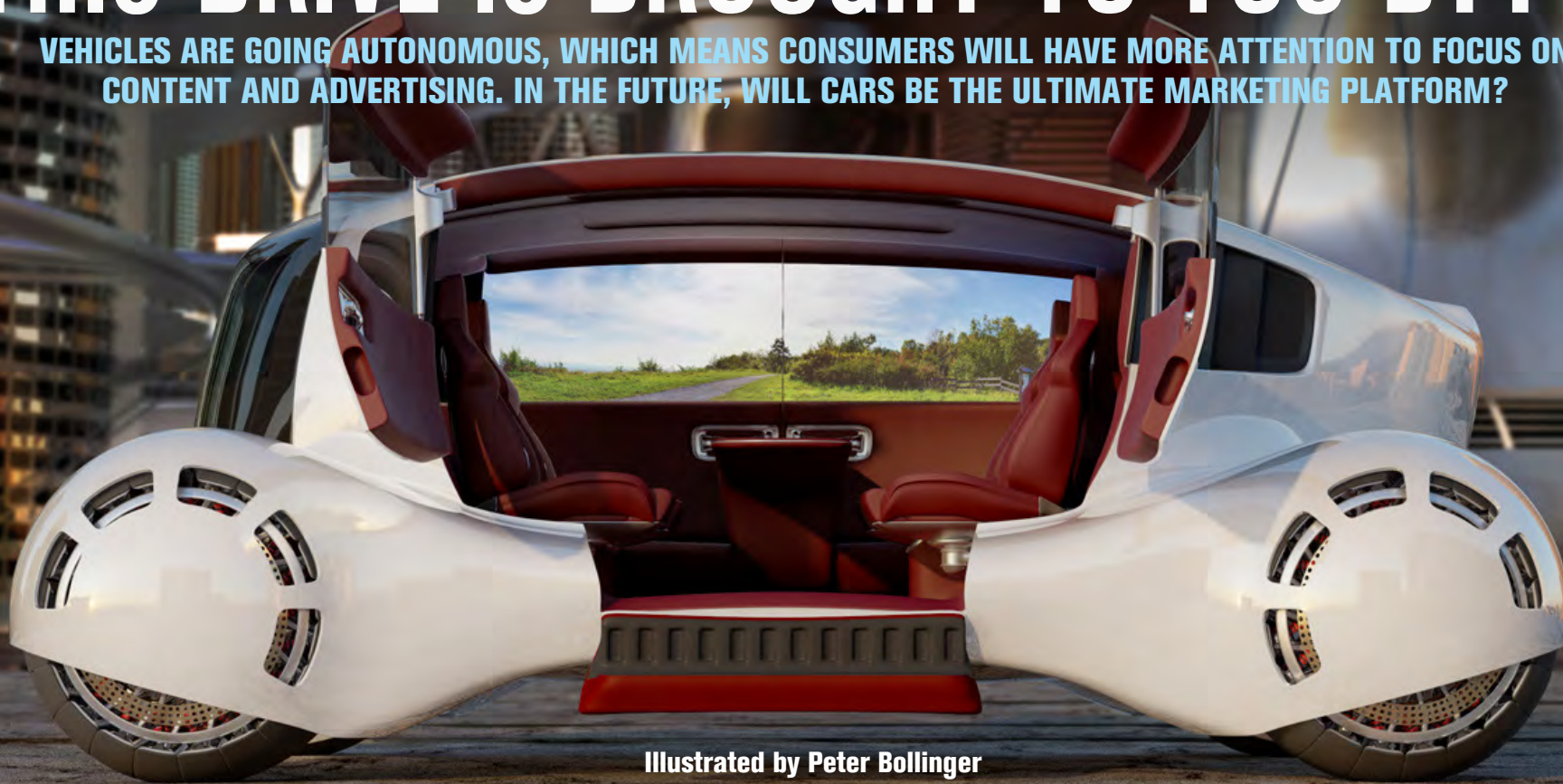
5

Petrolicious
(@petrolicious; 135k followers)
By pointing its camera to gorgeous classics, Petrolicious evokes a simple, sensual appreciation for old school rides. Petrolicious also adds another layer by profiling the cars' owners in Instagram posts, bringing the vehicles to life by depicting the endearing relationship between the human and the mechanical.

Named one of the ten car Instagrammers to watch by Gear Patrol, Basem Wasef is also an established automotive writer who contributes to Autoblog, Men's Journal, Robb Report, and Wired.

THIS DRIVE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY . . .

VEHICLES ARE GOING AUTONOMOUS, WHICH MEANS CONSUMERS WILL HAVE MORE ATTENTION TO FOCUS ON CONTENT AND ADVERTISING. IN THE FUTURE, WILL CARS BE THE ULTIMATE MARKETING PLATFORM?

Illustrated by Peter Bollinger

As sci-fi author William Gibson once said, "The future is already here—it's just not very evenly distributed."

Case in point:
The Google Self-Driving Car Project, launched in 2009, has already logged more than two million miles on American roads, while every manufacturer from Audi and Kia to Tesla and Toyota has put autonomous cars on its roadmaps. Another case in point: In February, outdoor advertising giant Clear Channel Outdoor formally launched RADAR, a digital billboard product that uses data derived from drivers' mobile phones data to target audiences and measure campaigns.

Imagine those technologies proliferating and converging, and you can begin to picture the future of mobile advertising. With no more need to drive, consumers in the driverless cars of the future will have much more bandwidth to focus their eyes on content—and much of that content will be shopping-related and/or ad-supported. Some predictions on where we may be headed:

1 The Four-Wheeled Den
Picture a car with windshield glass that can turn into a *Minority Report*-style display on (verbal) command. Meanwhile, the side and rear windows can be darkened thanks to electrochromic glass that can turn instantly opaque, effectively "dimming the lights" and converting the car into a cozy den on wheels. Now picture a windshield/monitor that functions as an ad-supported content/program/shopping hub for the driver and her passengers.

2 Detour Deals
In the car of the future, the in-dash nav screen becomes a connecting point for consumers and marketers. With every vehicle location-aware and synced with mobile phones, marketers can make targeted pitches to passengers to encourage them to try a nearby store, a particular product, a new restaurant or even a specific menu item. Once a passenger indicates he's in "Discover" mode, the nav screen's Siri-like voice can make on-the-fly "Detour Deal" offers like, "Tom, would you like to try the new truffle fries at McDonald's at half price? I can bring you to the drive-through in 4.5 minutes. Would you like me to place and charge your order so it will be ready when you arrive?"

3 The YouTube Tunnel

Imagine a day (it's coming) when the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey announces that the Holland Tunnel will only be open to self-driving vehicles. Now imagine the Port Authority calling for bids from major brands and media companies for the rights to rename the tunnel and outfit it, start to finish, with a seamless skin of flexible Organic Light-Emitting Diode (OLED) screens to create the world's first Digital Scenic Thruway (DST). The first DST "show" for commuters: a collaboration, sponsored by YouTube, between the Hayden Planetarium and Lucasfilm that turns the curving walls and ceiling of the tunnel into a virtual starscape, giving passengers the sensation of zooming through the galaxy.

4 Sponsored Custom Scenery

Don't like the industrial landscape or the stormy weather as you drive out of the city? Not to worry. As Mercedes demonstrated at CES 2015 with its F 01 driverless concept car, the front and side windows can double as high-resolution displays that can play more attractive scenery of your choosing (desert landscapes, mountains). Now imagine those pretty drive-by landscapes brought to you by a car company or in-image ads that show up on the bottom of these displays.

5 The Shopping Dock

How do you get products to consumers quickly? One solution is to deliver them with autonomous delivery vehicles, like Amazon's fleet of drones. Another solution is to have consumers' self-driving cars just go pick them up, which is why cars of the future will have trunks that function as dropboxes that can automatically dock at stores' loading zones to take in pre-purchased items—from a 12-pack of toilet paper to the ingredients for tonight's dinner. Cars' shopping docks will also sync with "Detour Deals."