



# Drive My Brand: FIAT's Search For Success

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PUBLISHED  
*September 2013*

## THE RUNDOWN

FIAT had been absent from the US car market for 28 years, so when the Italian automotive brand returned to North America, it had to contend with established competitors and diminished loyalty in three new generations of consumers. But through a savvy digital strategy, FIAT was able to drive both market share and brand awareness. One of the keys to its success was search. FIAT discovered that search not only helps people find things, but it also helps shapes their perceptions, making it a powerful brand-building tool. Moving into a highly competitive market with entrenched players, FIAT more than doubled sales in the course of a year and positioned themselves in the driver's seat for future successes.

FIAT models are small, but packed with personality — irreverent, free-wheeling and full of Continental flair. In 1979, US sales of the Italian cars reached an all-time high. But after gas prices fell, the small-car market stalled. Just a few years later, the brand pulled out of the North American market. Flash-forward to 2011. Consumers had

become more eco-conscious and small cars were once again in demand. FIAT was ready to zoom back into Stateside showrooms.

But as the world's sixth-largest car company revved up to regain its status among US consumers, it faced some serious obstacles in the road ahead. FIAT was entering a tough small-car market dominated by big competitors such as Honda, Toyota, Nissan, Chevrolet and MINI. What's more, that three-decade absence had created a large group of car buyers who were not familiar with the brand.

"After being out of the US market for 28 years, the challenge was to introduce the brand to generations (Gen X and Y) that had little to no awareness of the FIAT brand, and to rekindle the baby boomers who remember FIAT from their youth," says Casey Hurbis, Head of Communications, FIAT Brand North America. "There's not a day that goes by when I don't have a baby boomer recall a fond memory of FIAT."

But times had changed. "Introducing a brand into the market has become much more complex with media fragmentation and the way in which we consume media today," says Hurbis. "We need a holistic approach, whether we're building awareness or speaking with someone who's moving along the purchase path."

## SEARCHING FOR **DIGITAL SUCCESS**

With this in mind, FIAT turned to digital, which let them be agile and imaginative, just like its cars. One of the keys to jump-starting the brand was search. They adopted a two-fold approach: bid on specific "retention" or "branded" terms ("FIAT", "Abarth", "FIAT 500") to connect with people already looking for them, as well as broader "segment" or "category" terms ("small car", "compact car", "city car") to get the attention of new customers and undecided shoppers.

"Retention terms bring the highest yield at the lowest cost," explains Susan Thomson, Director of Media & Social Media, Chrysler Group LLC. "But we invest in our segment terms to ensure we capture undecided shoppers throughout their purchase process. We work to have the most relevant ad copy and we're constantly optimizing based on what customers are searching so we match up with their needs."

## BABY, YOU CAN **DRIVE MY BRAND**

Most companies believe that people only use search to find information, but FIAT discovered that it's also a powerful way to increase brand awareness and influence perception of a brand.

Google partnered with Ipsos to conduct a Brand Value of Search study to measure the impact

on brand awareness and perception of FIAT being present when customers are searching on segment terms. This study was performed on both desktop and mobile platforms by surveying users who searched the term “small car” on Google.com.

On desktop, there was a 127% increase in people’s total unaided recall of FIAT when the brand was present. Mobile users had a greater unaided awareness of FIAT overall, but their ability to recall the brand off the top of their heads still increased 35% when FIAT was seen at the top sponsored position on a mobile search result.

*FIAT’s presence on the search results page really helped drive undecided shoppers’ consideration of the brand.*

What’s more, the FIAT brand’s top-spot sponsored position on mobile and desktop even lowered the perception of some competitors’ market status and quality. One third of small car shoppers now saw FIAT as a market leader and a status-setter in high-quality small cars. Creative optimization lent a helping hand here, too. They tested two versions of the desktop ad and found that one which played on the FIAT brand’s Italian roots had a better impact on brand and competitor perception.

“While we understood the value of segment search in driving engagement, we were pleasantly surprised to also see a lift in FIAT brand measures thanks to search impressions alone,” says Thomson. “Through our presence on the search results page on small car queries, the FIAT brand’s awareness and favorability increased and it really helped drive undecided shoppers’ consideration of the brand.”

Of course, the user doesn’t stop at the search page. FIAT has dedicated a lot of focus in making sure the destination page is an engaging experience for the entering user. Recognizing the growth in mobile, FIAT recently performed a total reboot on its mobile site that focuses on the intentions and habits of a mobile auto shopper.

## SHIFTING GEARS, **SWITCHING DEVICES**

One of the FIAT brand’s most significant findings was its success in driving new brand awareness through different devices used by multi-screen shoppers. They discovered that people searching on mobile are a very different and very desirable audience: their awareness of FIAT was greater, they were more likely to see FIAT as a market leader compared to competitors and, as mentioned above, this perception increased when they saw the brand in the top search position.

"We know mobile users are quickly becoming the primary audience," says Thomson. "Approximately half of all searches for automotive-related content came from a mobile device last year. We know it's important to reach people in the moments that matter, regardless of the device they are using, and through Google's new Enhanced Campaigns we're able to drive new brand awareness and consideration across different screens."

## IN THE **DRIVER'S SEAT**

Armed with these insights, FIAT connected its search team with its brand marketing teams. Together, they developed creative that focused on building awareness and bid on segment terms, ensuring those ads displayed at the top of mobile and desktop search results.

FIAT's branding efforts paid off, with year-on-year sales growth of over 120% between 2011 and 2012. By embracing its challenger status in the market and taking an innovative approach to digital, FIAT unlocked the big opportunities in desktop and mobile search.

And by keeping digital front and center, FIAT is ensuring that this is just the beginning. "We're seeing the FIAT brand continue to grow," says Thomson. "Our target consumers are advanced consumers of media, so we'll continue to invest in mobile, social media and video." By next year, more people are expected to search on mobile than on desktop, but whatever the future brings, the FIAT brand's digital strategies have put it firmly in the driver's seat.