

TURN SIGNALS

Internet Advertising Trends and Perspective for the Performance Aftermarket

Does Sex Really Sell Performance Automotive Products?

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Even though the most profitable online businesses are those pedaling pornography, the famous advertising adage “Sex Sells”, is a fool’s advice if an organization is in the business of marketing products of integrity through internet channels. The reason, as we have discussed in past issues of Turn Signals, is that an internet user’s primary goal is to find what is relevant to their specific needs. Therefore, if a manufacturer is aiming to connect with online hobbyists researching Small Block Ford stroker kits, they’d better offer the consumer thorough information regarding stroker kits and that’s it. The web is no place to confuse a marketing message by adorning product with scantily clad women. In fact, whether the medium is printed or electronic, promoting a product with titillating imagery or adjacent to advertisements of low ethical value, is only serving to undermine the integrity of the brand or company itself.

Consider this, a magazine is a lot like a shopping mall, the landlord takes great care in assembling the right mix of retailers. Anybody who violates the standards of the complex, is tossed out - because for the mall to attract the audience it has to have the right mix and the right level of quality retailers. For a publication, advertisers can be compared to the retailers of a shopping mall. Curiously however, based on the types of ads seen in today’s mainstream performance aftermarket magazines, one must wonder if there are any standards established at all. Simply put, if a company considers themselves a high-level organization it only makes sense to advertise in a high-level publication.

At FordMuscle, we routinely flip through traditional magazines to see what our printed competition is up to. On the cover of January’s *Muscle Mustangs & Fast Fords* appears a porn star, in a suggestive pose, on the edge of a Mustang. The kind of cover that makes you a bit embarrassed to reach for the publication in a supermarket crowded with weekend family shoppers. Upon opening the magazine to browse the content, you’ll find more racy pictures of the cover model. In one caption, the editor of the magazine writes...

“Adult film star... took time out of her busy schedule to do Muscle Mustangs & Fast Fords -er -pose for its’ cover.”

In the previous “shopping mall” analogy we mentioned the importance of evaluating the fellow advertisers within

a magazine prior to making an ad commitment. In the case of January’s *MM&FF*, you’d better evaluate the container itself, because the publication may also be indirectly hurting your image.

These observations are not meant to be a stance on morality. They are simply a statement on how out-of-touch and desperate some publications have become. Some have even stooped to selling full page ads for “male enhancement” supplements. What does this say about how the magazine values their other advertisers? We believe it says, very loud and clear, that those publications will sell space to the highest bidder, even if it means the ads have nothing to do with the objective of the magazine. Not only is this a disservice to the readers, but it’s also a disgrace to the advertisers who have spent good money to “hopefully” market their products through a relevant publication.

There is a certainly a moral component as well. While our demographics show this hobby to be dominated by males, let’s not forget that many men use the hobby to bond with their sons, daughters, and even wives. While other publications may choose to objectify women and cars the same, it is unlikely that their readers, and hopefully their advertisers, feel comfortable supporting the stereotype.

FordMuscle by conscious design is a publication that thrives on delivering meaningful content. As a web publication our readers have the ability to provide immediate feedback – if they don’t feel what we are showing them is valuable, be it content or ads, they will go elsewhere very quickly. FordMuscle believes it has an obligation to provide readers with relevant advertisers, and to provide advertisers with a relevant publication.

Every publication has a choice to grab quick advertising revenue from low-level sources or to place whoever they choose on their front cover. At FordMuscle, we believe that taking these kind of senseless business and marketing opportunities are only damaging a magazine’s editorial credibility. For the potential advertiser, these are important decisions to monitor because while a publication’s editorial value begins to wane so does the public image of the advertisers supporting the magazine with its’ precious ad dollars.