



Honda Marketing Project a Good Fit for Pitt Business Students

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By Leigh Ann Wojciechowski

The Honda Fit, introduced April 17, is geared to nonconformist members of Generation Y, individualists who don't like to fit in (or at least like to give the impression they don't like to fit in).

To spread the message that the Fit is "More Than Meets the Eye"—Honda's advertising slogan for the car—among the five-door vehicle's Gen-Y target audience, American Honda Motor Co., Inc., issued a challenge to students at 18 colleges and universities across the country, including undergraduates in Pitt's College of Business Administration (CBA).

Organized by California-based EdVenture Partners, the Honda Fit Marketing Challenge is designed to advertise the Fit while giving business students a chance to apply what they have learned in the classroom to a real-world business campaign, building a good résumé credit along the way.

The 22 students in Pitt Associate Professor of Marketing Bob Gilbert's Projects in Marketing class created their own marketing agency, PROs in MOTION, and spent the spring term developing and implementing a marketing plan to increase awareness of the Fit among Pitt students.

PROs in MOTION is headed by Pitt senior marketing major Lauren Feintuch. "We entered the competition with the confidence that our innovative ideas and creative nontechnical marketing tactics would earn us the top prize," Feintuch declared.

Like the other 17 teams in the competition, Pitt's marketing agency received \$2,500 from Honda to carry out its marketing plan. To supplement their budget, Pitt students solicited donations from 23 Pittsburgh organizations, notably Shadyside Honda, which donated 95 Fit t-shirts and cosponsored several ads the Pitt agency placed in the Pitt News.

Students so engrossed themselves in the campaign that they began to sound like Honda employees.



Pitt seniors Lauren Feintuch (left) and Stephanie Masceri fit right into the Fit.

"It's really impressive how roomy the inside of this small car actually is," said Stephanie Masceri, assistant coordinator of PROs in MOTION (who, like Feintuch, will graduate from Pitt today with the Bachelor of Science degree in business administration). "On April 1 at the [Pitt-sponsored] Bigelow Bash street fair, we held a contest called 'How many can you Fit?' where we tried to fit as many people in the car as possible. I was astounded that we were able to fit 17 people into the car at one time. It goes to show you that the Fit really has 'Impressively Big Smallness'." (Because of an innovate split seat, the Fit's interior can be configured five different ways to maximize passenger volume and/or cargo capacity.)

PROs in MOTION presented its marketing plan and results to Honda executives in Pittsburgh April 21. Like the 17 other Honda Fit Marketing Challenge teams around the country, Pitt's team is being evaluated on its success in generating awareness (not sales) of the Fit. The three teams that Honda judges to have been most effective will win a trip for five of their agency members to Honda's headquarters in Torrance, Calif., in early June to present their work to company executives. The top team will receive \$5,000. Runners-up will get \$3,000 or \$1,000.

To determine precampaign awareness of the Fit on the Pittsburgh campus, PROs in MOTION members surveyed their peers and found that 5.3 percent of students surveyed had some knowledge of the new Honda model.

PROs in MOTION's ensuing marketing campaign included a public relations blitz as well as "guerilla" marketing techniques—unconventional marketing designed to deliver a lot of bang for not a lot of bucks, such as remote-control car races, Honda prize giveaways, an appearance by local Kiss-FM radio personality Bonics, sidewalk chalk messages, "guess the (car) parts" contest, and postings on Web sites popular with Gen Yers, including facebook.com and myspace.com.

Following their campaign, PROs in MOTION members surveyed their peers again and found that 51.6 percent had heard of the Fit, a nearly 10-fold increase in awareness.

In addition to their marketing campaign, PROs in MOTION students raised \$126 by giving away hot dogs on campus and collecting donations. (The hot dogs were, of course, served on napkins imprinted with the Fit logo.) The students plan to make a donation in Honda's name to Ride-4-Kids, a nonprofit organization that supports the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation. Masceri explained that this act of charity was one more way the agency spread the word that the Honda Fit is "More Than Meets the Eye."

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