

Car brand identity isn't what it used to be

It's not until you're standing in the rain and tell the parking lot guy "get me my Geo Prism" that you start to realize the importance of brand identity in the automobile business.

First you get this blank stare, so you mumble something like "You know, the little yellow car. Looks like a Toyota. Actually, it is a Toyota, but it's sold by Chevy. But it doesn't actually say 'Chevy' anywhere, see. Or Toyota either."

"Look, give me my keys and I'll find it myself."

I remember when a Chevy was a Chevy. This is the sort of statement that is guaranteed to get a few of my progenies' eyeballs rolled to the ceiling, but the fact is that "a Chevy" used to have a kind of solid, no-nonsense ability to let someone know what kind of car you drove. Sort of like "a Coke" used to work in a res-

aurant without a followup question like: "Classic Coke or Diet Coke?"

THE LAST real Chevy (pronounced Chivvy) that Chevrolet ever built was a straight-six Nova, preferably gunmetal blue with an automatic transmission. A nun's car, as a guy I worked with who had dropped out of a Jesuit seminary called it. Also once described as a "Heavy Chevy Blue-Bomber Special" by a young woman acquaintance who drove one, who also left me convinced that a \$600 car bought with the earnings of a first job can look as good as a faded pair of jeans.

A newer Chevy improved with age, like wine, or at least aged with dignity, managing a certain aptomph even while propped on a couple of cinder blocks with the engine hanging from the limb of a tree. A proper



auto talk
Dan McCosh

Chevy engine came apart with a Crescent wrench, the seats quickly developed a patina that resisted further staining, and you were allowed one or two holes generated by a screwdriver left in your hip pocket.

Near the end of the line old Chevys kind of blurred together, like old married couples who begin to resemble each other, as a red door got rehung on a blue car and a trans-plant transmission was installed that slipped a little less.

BUT THEY were unquestionably Chevys.

All of this came to mind as I read about the efforts of Jim Perkins, who is to Chevrolet what Billy Martin is to the Yankees, struggling to improve the brand identity of Geo with Chevrolet dealers by spending a bundle on a new ad campaign.

Along with trying to make Geo a household word, Perkins has to sell a bunch of cars with names like Lumina, Celebrity, Corsica and Beretta — the latter the subject of a lawsuit

by the handgun manufacturer of the same name. Try those on a parking lot attendant while you are in a hurry sometime.

Not that proliferating names and confusing customers was invented by Chevrolet. Chrysler still is trying to sell cars through more divisional umbrellas than General Motors, although to its credit it still makes things simple by calling most of them LeBaron. Even the most recognizable importers such as Volkswagen keep making up names to further confuse their customers, some of whom are still waiting for a phone call on their used Dasher.

Worst of all are relatively new marques such as Mitsubishi, with such unfamiliar names they are likely to end up in the stereo section of the classifieds in the auto section.

The lack of brand identity can pla-

gue you in mysterious ways. The other day I heard a story about a guy trying to sell a Mitsubishi who waited about a week without a single call. Finally, he changed the ad to read that he had a Honda to sell, and was deluged. To the inquiries, he claimed that the paper made a mistake, but you ought to see this Mitsubishi anyway. He sold the car in a day.

When I stop to think about it, there isn't a single car on sale today that conjures up an undiluted image in my mind when I hear its name. Jeep comes close, but that's before you realize there isn't a simple "Jeep" anymore — it's XJ, Sahara, Wrangler, etc.

It's enough to make you want to reach for a box of Kleenex.

Dan McCosh is the automotive editor of Popular Science.

business people

Gerard L. Doelle of Birmingham has been named executive director of the American Heart Association of Michigan. Doelle was formerly an affiliate management consultant in the office of field service for the American Heart Association national center in Dallas.

David Vawter has joined W.B.

Doner & Co. in Southfield as senior copywriter. Prior to joining Doner, Vawter was with Doc-Anderson in Louisville, Ky., for three years. He is a graduate of Indiana University.

Daniel Bennett, Lisa Daerman and Jane Marie McCarthy have joined Ross Roy Communications.

Bennett lives in Birmingham and was previously with Marketing Educational Services. Daerman also lives in Birmingham and was formerly with Tatham, Lalrd & Kudner in Chicago. McCarthy was formerly a classified sales representative for Grain Communications before joining Ross Roy.

Tamara Smith of Farmington Hills has been promoted to senior market research analyst at W.B. Doner & Co. in Southfield. Smith joined Doner in 1986 as a research assistant.

Donald Greenwell Jr. of Bloomfield Hills has been promoted to

project director at Walbridge Aldinger. Greenwell is a graduate of Michigan State University and has been with Walbridge Aldinger for five years.

Abilith-Price's Building Products Division in Troy has appointed Steven R. Wook to assistant product manager and Marilyn E. Pearson to assistant advertising manager.

Karen Kirchner has joined W.B. Doner & Co. in Southfield as an account executive. In this position she will work on the Michigan State Lottery. Prior to joining Doner, Kirchner was with Mars Advertising in Southfield.

Carol Boyke of Rochester has been named operations executive for the Lincoln Mercury Dealer Association account at Young & Rubicam Inc. Boyke was a recent participant of the company's management development program.

Snooty help can impact sales

Small business retailers, beware. Your employees may be exhibiting "snob syndrome," a malady found in those who deal with the public in establishments known for their upscale image and clientele. When employees begin to play judge and jury with every customer who walks through your doors, you stand to lose a great deal over the long term.

"Anyone who has patronized a posh store without being dressed for it knows what I'm talking about. I remember the time a friend and I went shopping for purses," says one Oakland County business owner. "We were dressed in our jeans, so nobody wanted to wait on us. Instead the salespeople were fawning over some woman who was trying to decide on a scarf, and here we were, ready to spend at least a few hundred dollars

between the two of us. Needless to say, I bought the purses somewhere else."

What causes a salesperson to take on the role of snob as part of his or her daily dealings with customers? "It takes salespeople who act that way are very insecure, generally speaking," said Catherine Kasten, a Plymouth resident and self-employed computer specialist. "If these people are gossips by nature, then it isn't surprising to see them judging

customers they know nothing about."

Business owners and managers who have received complaints about snooty sales personnel should always treat these types of incidents seriously. "If the manager or owner doesn't seem to care or doesn't act on the complaint immediately, you've got to question where they're at in terms of their own attitudes and behaviors," Kasten said. "Whenever I've had problems and found the management to be uncoopera-

tive or apathetic, I make a point to warn friends about the business and how it operates."

No business stands to benefit by hiring or retaining employees who take it upon themselves to judge the "right" from the "wrong" customers. Every customer should be treated with the same amount of respect and service regardless of the size or nature of the sale.

Next week, we will discuss what can be done to deal with employees and co-workers who instigate such problems.

Mary DiPaolo is the owner of MarkeTyends, a Farmington Hills-based business consulting firm. She is also producer and host of the cable television series, "Chamber Perspectives."

Lisa Laurala of Farmington Hills has been named director of accounting at Oakwood Hospital. Laurala went to Oakwood Hospital from Michigan Health Care Corp.

Dennis Van Dusen of Farmington Hills has been named co-manager of the 84 Lumber Store in Marne, Ohio. Van Dusen is a graduate of Western Michigan University and is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Van Dusen of Farmington Hills.

James Ciesnik III of Southfield, a life insurance agent with American Mutual Life Insurance Co., has qualified as a member of the 1989 Million Dollar Round Table.

Eugene Kaminski of Troy has been named assistant administrator for human resources at Children's Hospital in Detroit. Kaminski had been director of employee relations, benefits and training since 1982. He holds a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and a master's degree from Central Michigan University.

Robert Massey of Farmington Hills has been named to the newly created post of senior vice president of franchise development for Little Caesars Pizza.

Sandra Philpott Matthews has rejoined Stone, August, Baker Communication Companies as an account supervisor. Matthews received a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oregon.



focus: small business
Mary DiPaolo

The Window and Door Store

SUMMER WAREHOUSE SALE!!!

3 Days Only — August 10, 11, & 12

- 6' Primed Sliding Wood Patio Door \$399⁰⁰ ea.
- 6' Steel Insulated Swinging Patio Door \$425⁰⁰ ea.
- Primed Casements & Slide By in Stock 35% OFF LIST
- Lee Haven Steel Insulated Storm Doors \$115⁰⁰ ea.
- Skylite Wood Windows-Introductory Offer 40% OFF LIST
- 2'-8" and 3'-0" Prehung Flush Steel Insulated Doors \$109⁰⁰ ea
- All Damaged, Distressed and Outdated Merchandise 45%-65% OFF LIST
- All Direct Set, Sash, and Insulated glass units PRICED TO SELL!!!

Let THE WINDOW & DOOR STORE be your shopping place for energy efficient, quality crafted wood windows and steel doors.

THE WINDOW & DOOR STORE

830 Plymouth Rd. • Plymouth, MI 48170 • 313-459-6911

THE WINDOW & DOOR STORE is a Division of Weather Shield Mfg., Inc.

Mon., Wed., Fri. 8-5:30
Tues., Thurs. 8-8:00
Saturday 10-2:00