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Emotive – Promoting the Electric Vehicle Experience

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Summary

A significant obstacle for electric vehicle uptake is that consumers lack awareness of EVs and don't yet see them as a viable option. In an effort to raise public awareness of this emerging technology in British Columbia, several partners launched a public outreach campaign called "Emotive - the Electric Vehicle Experience". This campaign plays on the tactile and emotional appeal of EVs and portrays them as fun and exciting. This paper will take you through the development and execution of the campaign strategy, success and challenges to-date, and how outreach efforts are being amplified through community partners and ambassadors across the province.

Keywords: consumers, education, marketing, EV, communication

1 Introduction

This report summarizes a collaborative public outreach campaign called *Emotive - the Electric Vehicle Experience*, aimed to raise the profile of electric cars and support market uptake of this new technology in the province of British Columbia, Canada.

Electrification of automobiles provides a significant opportunity to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants, particularly in British Columbia (B.C.), where 93% of electricity generation is clean energy. Realizing this, a broad collaboration of public, private, academic, and non-profit stakeholders called Plug In BC has been working to lay the groundwork for plug-in electric vehicles and related charging infrastructure in British Columbia. Thanks in large part to this group's efforts, and with funding from the provincial Clean Energy Vehicle Program during 2012-2013, and again in 2015-2016, B.C. is now home to over 1000 charging stations, leading the country in per-capita charging infrastructure and sales of electric vehicles (EVs).

Despite this success, today's consumers have a general lack of awareness of EVs or understanding that they can be a viable option for when car ownership is necessary. A survey by the World Wildlife Federation in 2012 found that a full 47% of respondents (Canadian general public) had no experience of electric vehicles, either in person or through other media, such as online, TV or radio. In other words, almost half of Canadians had no awareness of their existence. In 2014, the WWF repeated this survey and found the same result [1].

In an effort to raise public awareness of this emerging technology, and further promote sustainable transportation options in B.C, Plug in BC partners: Province of BC, Fraser Basin Council, Metro Vancouver, City of Vancouver, City of Surrey, and others, launched a public outreach campaign called *Emotive – the Electric Vehicle Experience* in 2013. This campaign emphasizes the tactile and emotional appeal of electric vehicles and conveys the experience of driving them as fun and exciting.

2 Campaign Development

2.1 Market Research

Engaging with a public relations firm, the group applied existing market research to identify target audiences, and define key messaging, to most effectively raise the profile of EVs [2]. This research identified three target audience segments as early adopters and early majority (likely to purchase an electric vehicle over the next 5 years). These were:

- **Active Environmental Segment**: This group has strong biospheric and altruistic values, which they are willing to adapt their lifestyles around. They believe that climate change and air pollution are serious issues, and they are 81% female.
- **Technology-Oriented Segment**: This group has strong self-enhancement values and a penchant for the latest technology. They are likely to have informed themselves about electric vehicles and are 55% men.
- **Low-Flex Environmental Segment**: This group is environmentally motivated, but not as likely to be open to change, and are less flexible in their lifestyles. Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles have appeal to this group, as they allow them to reduce their environmental impact without significant lifestyle changes.

All three audiences shared certain traits:

- Higher income levels (household incomes over $100k);
- Tend to be university educated;
- Geographically dispersed across B.C.

In developing messaging that would resonate with audiences, we referenced survey data by the Pecan Street Institute of 68 electric vehicle owners. This 2014 study found that the tactile experience of driving an electric vehicle were what EV owners were most passionate about. When asked "What features and/or aspects of your electric vehicle do you like the most?", 59% cited "power, speed, performance, 30% cited "quiet' and only 11% cited "environmental and societal benefits" [3].

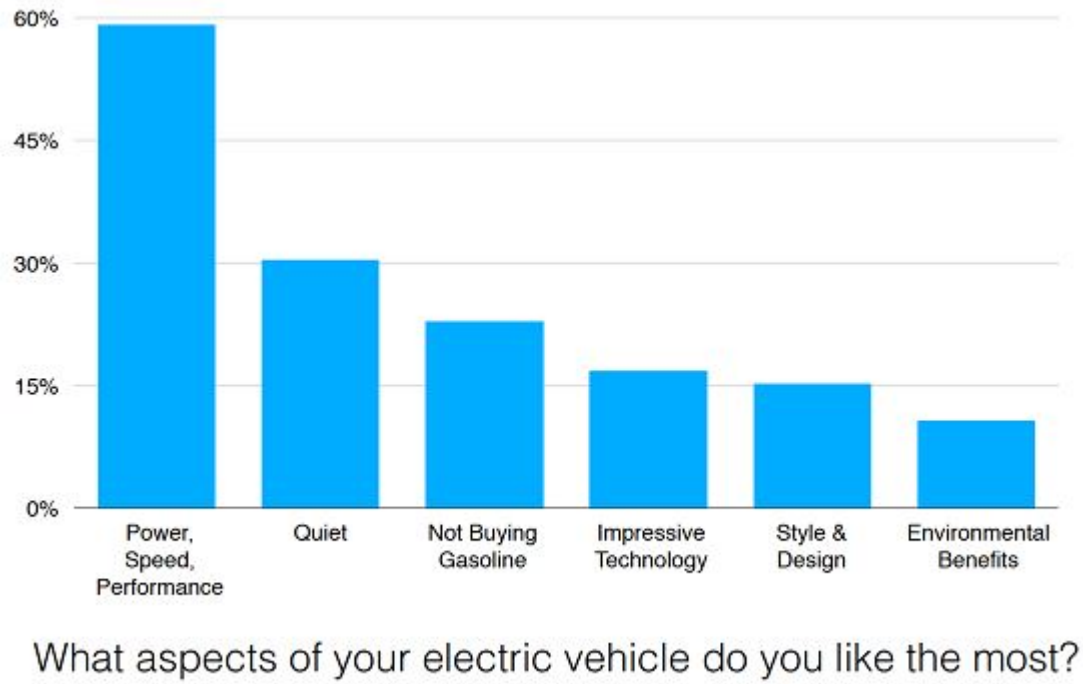

Figure 1: Survey responses when participating EV owners were asked "what aspects of your electric vehicle do you like the most?" [4]

2.2 Emotive Messages

Based on this research, the market research group developed *Emotive - the Electric Vehicle Experience*. The approach this campaign takes is to emphasize the physical and emotional experience of driving electric, and presents collateral that emphasize the key messages:

- *It's fun to drive EVs.*
  - EVs are quiet, smooth and stylish on the road. It's truly a cool, different and exhilarating feeling when you are behind the wheel of an EV.
- *An EV is perfect for someone who appreciates and embraces advanced technology.*
  - This is cutting-edge technology that provides instantaneous acceleration, a fun, quiet and smooth driving experience. EVs have just one gear, so unlike gasoline-powered vehicles, you enjoy the same powerful torque at all speeds.
  - Some tech highlights include: regenerative breaks, smartphone apps, pre-heating, pre-cooling, and music sounds like you have never heard before.
- *An EV is perfect for someone who values and embraces an environmentally friendly lifestyle.*
  - Zero gas = zero air pollution. Adopting electricity as a clean fuel means reduced car emissions and healthier lungs for everyone.
- *EVs provide freedom from gas, but that's only one of a number of additional benefits.*
  - The cost-savings and the convenience of home charging will change how you feel about owning a car. But that's just one benefit.
- *Buying an EV is a smart choice.*
  - You will save money and resources.
  - Using an EV for regular weekday driving is a breeze – there is no need to own a gas-guzzler.
  - We have the infrastructure to support greater EV use in the province.

Marketing materials were then developed to emphasize this experience of driving electric vehicles and to make fun associations.

Figure 2: Emotive banners and rack cards make associations between electric vehicles and fun activities.

3 Campaign Implementation

3.1 Social Media

In an effort to stretch the limited budget and reach audiences across the province, *Emotive*'s primary activity happens on social media, specifically Facebook. *Emotive* has nearly 2,000 online followers, and engages with them on a daily basis sharing news, videos, myth-busting, and experience-based posts about electric vehicles [5]. Occasionally the *Emotive* team will pay to promote posts to help reach new audiences, and staff have also worked with sponsors to launch several contests, for the chance to win a week or weekend with an electric vehicle, paired with a trip or adventure getaway.

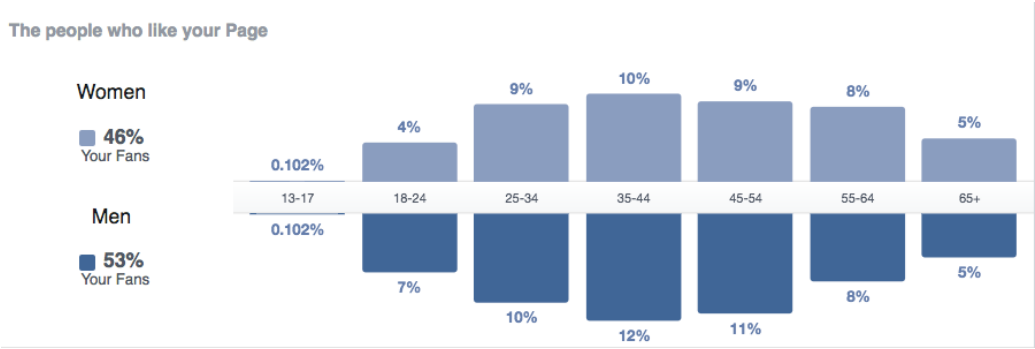

Figure 3: A breakdown of *Emotive's* Facebook audience demographics.

3.2 Ambassadors

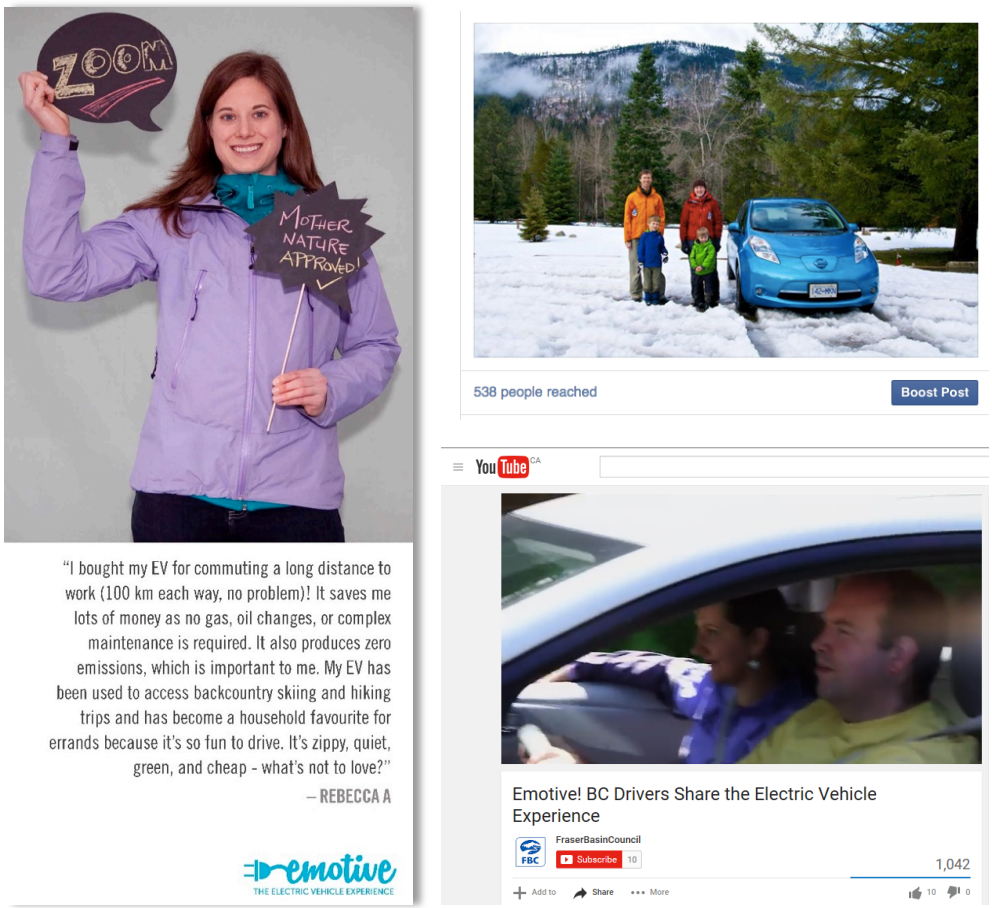

Figure 4: Testimonials are an important element of the campaign and featured in *Emotive's* collateral. Two families were featured in the *Emotive* campaign video providing a testimonial on the pleasure of driving electric as well as how it fits into their lifestyles. Two *Emotive* Ambassadors were featured in pull-up banners, with a testimonial on what made them switch to electric. Ambassadors are also frequently profiled on Facebook under the hash tag #EVstories.

As a new technology, prospective EV-buyers want to know that vehicles can meet their needs and offer reliability. As such, testimonials are an important element of the *Emotive* campaign. *Emotive* relies on "EV Ambassadors", a growing group of EV owners who bring their authentic voice and real driving experience to the campaign. These Ambassadors are featured in campaign materials (banners, video, etc), encouraged to participate in discussions on *Emotive's* Facebook page, and, most importantly, attend events as volunteers for the Emotive campaign.

3.3 Events

The *Emotive* campaign uses a collaborative approach to effectively deliver its brand-neutral message and increase public outreach. *Emotive* has developed a unique "community kit" [6] allowing partners to have access to the brand and other materials, such as banners, tents, volunteer training kit, FAQs binder, giveaways, and rack cards. Since 2014, *Emotive* has participated in dozens of events across B.C., in partnership with local governments and community organizations. An *Emotive* display requires at minimum one EV and an EV ambassador to be present. *Emotive* staff will train community partners on the campaign's key messages, and help attain vehicles for display, partnering with local dealerships and ambassador volunteers. Events have included music festivals, farmers market, show and shines, community celebrations and more.

Figure 5: *Emotive* summer event booth

When feasible, *Emotive* offers a ride and drive (test-drive) to provide the public the opportunity to truly experience these vehicles. This is by far the most effective method of communicating the exhilarating and tactile attributes of electric cars. Coordinating ride and drives are more resource intensive than having vehicles on static display, and for the first year and a half of the campaign, were only offered for major events, such as the Vancouver International Auto Show. In 2016, *Emotive* staff is working more closely with dealerships and automakers, to make test-drives a more regular feature.

4 Next Steps

British Columbians are gradually becoming more familiar with electric cars, and as awareness improves, the desire for a deeper level of information increases. *Emotive* is therefore starting to integrate more closely with the PlugInBC.ca website, which provides information on B.C. charging infrastructure, vehicles, programs and incentives, as well as general FAQs.

When launched, the campaign primarily focused on the regions of B.C. where vehicle uptake and accessibility was higher, particularly in the lower mainland of the province. As awareness improves in those areas, the intention is to expand to further areas of the province. Doing so requires forming new partnerships with local governments, dealerships and existing EV owners in those regions.

As audiences become more familiar with EVs and more product becomes available, *Emotive* will be pressed to evolve the campaign message to answer questions that people may raise. *Emotive* proponents are currently looking to develop a refresh of the campaign materials in 2016-2017 to reach new audiences and further promote the key messages.

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Authors

Charlotte Argue is Program Manager for the Fraser Basin Council's Climate Change and Air Quality Program, and leads their green transportation and fleet projects. As a key member of the multi-partner initiative "Plug In BC", she has been working to enable electric vehicle market transformation in British Columbia. Her roles include supporting EV adoption in B.C. fleets, administering the provincial public infrastructure rollout, and managing the *Emotive* outreach campaign. Charlotte holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Environmental Sciences from the University of British Columbia, and serves on the board of Modo, the Car Coop.

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