

Chevrolet gets the word out: Don't call me Chevy

Memo pushes for brand name consistency

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By Chris Woodyard

Some General Motors executives are ready to drive their Chevy to the levee — and into the river. The nickname Chevy, anyway.

GM spent much of Thursday in damage-control mode as it reacted to a “poorly worded” internal memo, leaked to The New York Times, that told staff they now must refer to GM’s best-known brand only by its formal name, Chevrolet — not Chevy — in all communications.

GM didn’t disown the memo or entirely back down. While insisting “We love Chevy” (the name) in a clarification statement, GM continued to maintain, as in the memo, that it needs a “consistent brand name,” i.e., Chevrolet, for global markets.

Whether it’s Bud for Budweiser or Coke for Coca-Cola, most brand managers would kill to have consumers give their brands pet names. Indeed, Chevrolet’s Internet home page on Thursday featured the headline “Over 1,000 people a day switch to Chevy” and included a tab, “Experience Chevy.” In the 1960s, Chevrolet even fielded a line of compacts with the name Chevy II.

“It’s totally insane” to avoid the nickname, says Jim Hall, analyst for 2953 Analytics and a 14-year GM engineering veteran. “It’s throwing away the equity you have out there.”

The name Chevy is ingrained in pop culture, whether rhapsodized in song or pasted on a billboard. Hall says Chevys are even called Chevy in countries where GM doesn’t sell the brand.

The GM executive who co-wrote the memo seemed entertained by the brouhaha. “It makes me smile because it is something that has been interestingly debated today,” says Alan Batey, vice president of sales for Chevrolet. “We love Chevy. We love people saying that. There’s a warmth and relationship there.”

But he’s not backing down from his memo. “It’s about having a very consistent message around the brand name. It’s not about a massive change in strategic direction. It’s really a tweak to things that we already do.”

Chevy is a “term of endearment,” and marketers can’t control what consumers call their products, says Ian Beavis, of Nielsen Automotive Group and a former marketing executive for Kia, Mitsubishi and others. But Beavis notes that the nickname doesn’t work in new markets where Chevrolet is trying to get a start. So overall, he says, it may be the right idea in some places: “They are trying to get people focused on calling it Chevrolet.”

Founded in 1911 and named for racing driver Louis Chevrolet, Chevy has been Chevy for generations.

Contributing: Sharon Silke Carty

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Assessment Questions

1. What is another headline for this article?
 - A. *Chevy wants to get formal, tries to lose nickname*
 - B. *GM wantsto push into new markets*
 - C. *Chevrolet hates its "pet name"*
 - D. *Chevy will remain a brand name*
2. In paragraph nine, what point does the reporter make by quoting Ian Beavis who said, "marketers can't control what consumers call their products"?
 - A. Even though GM issued the internal memo, they cannot control what the public calls its product.
 - B. Consumers tend to make nicknames for products they like the most.
 - C. GM should issue more memos in order to get consumers to change how they reference Chevy vehicles.
 - D. Consumers like to control the market.
3. What does Alan Batey, vice president of sales for Chevrolet, mean when he says, "It's about having a consistent message around the brand name."
 - A. Chevrolet wants to have a focused image or message about its product.
 - B. Chevrolet is trying to force employees to think about Chevrolet differently.
 - C. Chevrolet is trying to fight against the negative things other companies have said about it.
 - D. GM is the parent company of Chevrolet.
4. According to the story, what is the MOST VALID argument for having GM employees refer to the brand name as Chevrolet only?
 - A. The name Chevy sounds juvenile and will decrease sales of cars to adults.
 - B. The nickname Chevy does not work in some markets where GM is trying to sell Chevrolet.
 - C. GM wants to control employees so they can cotrol consumers.
 - D. Chevy is a "term of endearment."
5. Why does the author conclude by saying "Chevy has been Chevy for generations"?
 - A. To argue that consumers should be allowed to determine the name for Chevrolet.
 - B. to remind readers that employees do not want to refer to Chevy as Chevrolet.
 - C. To support the goal of Chevrolet to push for brand consistency.
 - D. To point out that Chevrolet has had its nickname for a long time.
6. What can the reader conclude after reading this article?
 - A. GM is trying to distance itself from Budweiser and Coca-Cola.
 - B. GM is the parent company of Chevrolet.
 - C. GM stands for General Motors.
 - D. GM will continue to love "Chevy" (the name) even as they create brand consistency.