

Mitsubishi Motors retools, funds local car advertising  
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By Kathy Showalter

California-based Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America is targeting Columbus consumers in an ad campaign designed to increase awareness of the Mitsubishi brand.

Mitsubishi is funding a local campaign that fits its "built for living" national advertising program, which includes Columbus as one of the top 41 retail communities in the United States. While Mitsubishi pays for the creative work behind the metro ad campaigns, local advertising associations comprised of Mitsubishi dealers direct where those ads go.

"The biggest problem Mitsubishi has had in Central Ohio is name awareness among the potential Asian import car buyers," said Keith Dennis, president of Dennis AutoPoint and president of the Central Ohio Mitsubishi Dealers Advertising Association Inc. "The driving force behind this is to get the Mitsubishi name on their shopping list."

Others in the Central Ohio ad association are the Ricart Automotive Group and Mathews-Kennedy Honda Mitsubishi in Marion.

Neither Mitsubishi nor the dealers would disclose the amount of local spending for the campaign. The local campaign kicks off this month with television, where Dennis estimates 90 percent of the money will be spent.

Participating dealers in the Mitsubishi effort already spend significant dollars advertising. New York-based Competitive Media Reporting said Ricart Automotive Group and Dennis group spent \$3.7 million in print ads through daily, Sunday and preprint publications in 1997. Ricart spent \$2.8 million on television advertising. Both of those figures include advertising Mitsubishi and other lines the dealers market.

Central Ohio consumer response to Mitsubishi is better than consumers nationally, said Dennis. He estimates 1,200 to 1,300 new Mitsubishis were sold in 1997 in Central Ohio - roughly 4 percent of all the Asian imports sold. But nationally, the Mitsubishi brand makes up only 1.75 percent of the Asian imports purchases, he said.

"Demographics of the metropolitan Columbus area fit very nicely for Mitsubishi," says Dennis.

Mitsubishi sees its chief competition as Toyota and Honda. It targets well educated, highly-paid professionals ages 25 to 49.

Kim Custer of Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America in Cypress, Calif., said the manufacturer changed its advertising strategy on the local level, asserting some image control.

"In the past, each dealer (network) could select a local agency to support their dealer advertising in metropolitan markets, but it was giving Mitsubishi Motors a lot of different kinds of messages around the country. Many weren't consistent with the national brand image," said Custer.

Mitsubishi's advertising is handled by G2 Los Angeles, a division of Grey Advertising. The Central Ohio dealers' group is working through Chicago-based Deutsch Inc., which is buying the media.

"I've noticed increased traffic," said Eric Grills, general manager of Mathews-Kennedy in Marion. "It could be the advertising, but it could be from a combination of things like the weather and the time of the year. Every little bit does help."