

Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs: Marketing to their Consumer

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IMC 603: Consumer Behavior & Insights

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November 29, 2022

Introduction

With pet ownership on the rise, it is apparent that car makers should incorporate suitable features into their new models for those traveling with pets. Nissan is working to satisfy this consumer niche with its X-Trail 4Dogs model. “The vast majority says they would buy a new car that boasts more dog-friendly features. To meet their demands, Nissan has unveiled a unique new model – the X-Trail 4Dogs concept – demonstrating that its flagship crossover is the perfect car for family adventures, particularly ones involving those with four legs” (Yarrow, 2017). Below, we will discuss the strategies and consumer approaches when launching this product.

The Problem Recognition

In order to design a marketing strategy to stimulate problem recognition for dog owners, focusing on both the actual state and desired state would be most advantageous for Nissan’s X-Trail 4Dogs campaign. Connecting with a dog owner’s feelings about their current situation and portraying a more desirable dog lifestyle would help consumers bridge the gap from problem to solution.

Traveling with dogs can be inconvenient and stressful for the owner and their dog. “A dog in a car isn’t a natural state of affairs, so it’s no wonder that many of them don’t enjoy car travel. Some show their unhappiness by howling or barking, some chew the seats, and others are simply sick. Occasionally, dogs love to travel but get so excited that they leap around, chewing and barking” (Brown, 2022). As a marketer, finding ways to capitalize on these problems and offer a quick solution helps consumers understand their current situation and wanted condition.

Similar to the print ad below by Pedigree, utilizing a strategy that blatantly draws a direct line from problem to solution in an inspiring way will connect with the inner needs and wants of the target market. “In general, importance is determined by how critical the problem is to the maintenance of the consumer’s desired lifestyle” (Mothersbaugh, et al, 2020). Magnifying the problem and importance of having more dog-friendly care will influence the consumer to make a better choice for their pet when purchasing their next car.

Figure 1*A Better Life with a Dog*

(D., 2015)

Consumer Problem Approaches

Nissan identified a “sizeable market segment consisting of consumers who are dog lovers and who may consider their pets as a part of the family” (Hawkins, 2020). These consumers identified and considered their pet's needs when going through the decision-making process of purchasing a new vehicle. With this info, “Nissan reviewed data collected from The Kennel Club, and here are the findings:

- 99.9% consider their pet as part of the family
- 90.5% take their dog(s) on car trips lasting 10+ minutes
- 88.7% take their dog(s) in the car at least once a week
- 88.9% consider dog-friendly features when buying a car”

(Hawkins, 2020).

Nissan found a potential problem to solve: to make the Nissan X-Trail family vehicle more pet-friendly by becoming more flexible and incorporating more comfort for the family canine. This will make life easier for the consumer or driver of the vehicle.

To discover consumers' problems, Nissan used multiple approaches to tackle the lack of pet-friendly upgrades to the X-Trial family vehicle for dog lovers. One of the approaches used is *human factor research*, identifying or sympathizing with dog-loving consumers and considering how Nissan will provide a more efficient and comfortable ride for both the consumer and their pet(s).

Customizing the vehicle to fit the needs of a family pet(s) alleviates the stress, time, and gas of repeated stops to accommodate the canines' needs during a road trip. This would help to eliminate fatigue in the consumer and improve a better safety response time while on the road.

Another approach used was the *activity and product analysis*. Needing a more efficient and comfortable ride for the family pet, whether, on a road trip or daily errands, this activity helps in creating an "activity analysis." The Kennel Club data results helped Nissan look at the changes dog lovers would love to see in a vehicle they want to purchase. The "product analysis" for the Nissan X-Trail was examined, and consumer analysis helped Nissan produce and market the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs.

Featured upgrades in the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs include:

"Outside Features:

- Pull-out ramp for easy loading in/out of cargo area
- Pull-out 360 degree shower (and blow dryer)

Inside Features:

- Two-way cameras in cargo and front seat areas (so owner and pet can see one another)
- Padded leather upholstery (for easy cleaning and comfort)
- No-spill water bowl
- Smart device dog treat dispenser"

(Hawkins, 2020).

Nissan extended the upgraded featured kit for all the previous Nissan X-Trail owners for an additional charge of less than \$1000 to any dog lover owning a Nissan X-Trail. Becoming more familiar with consumers and creating a customized product to fit the lifestyles of consumers is important. The human factor research approach and the activity and product analysis approach played key roles in adding lifestyle upgrades to an existing product.

The Marketing Strategy

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, 85% of dog owners consider their pets family. "American pet owners are transforming the cultural definition of family. Dogs and cats are treated like children, siblings, and grandchildren" (Phys.org, n.d.). In 2020, Americans spent more than \$103 billion on their pets, considering them in their decision-making for things such as homebuying, job location, and travel and budgets. (Phys.org) Marketing for pets, especially dogs, has grown even more since 2020. "Globally, the pet care market has grown to \$261 billion in 2022; up from \$245 billion in 2021. An

estimated 6.1% compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) will catapult that figure to \$350 billion by 2027” (Roberts, 2022).

Because pets have become an integral part of their owners' lives, car companies like Jeep, Toyota, Subaru, Volvo, Honda, Kia, Tesla, and Nissan have started marketing vehicles specifically with our furry family members in mind. “We looked for a large enough cargo area for big dogs or multiple travel crates, and we checked to see how high the hop would be to get into the vehicle. A low loading floor and a rear door that opens wide were important, and tie-downs in the cargo area were a bonus. Flat-folding rear seats helped too. Many of these vehicles also have optional climate control for the back seats or cargo area. A sunroof or moonroof lets your pup have fresh air without hanging their head out the window at high speeds. Some even have dog-specific accessories available from the manufacturer” (Hall-Geisler, 2022). Nissan went even further to develop a concept car, the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs, specifically designed to suit the needs of dog lovers.

In order to market the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs, Nissan surveyed 1,300 Kennel Club dog owners. They found that not only do dog owners consider pets to be family members, 90.5 percent take their dogs on car trips, 88.7 percent take their dogs in the car at least once a week, and 88.9 percent consider dog-friendly features when buying a car (Mothersbaugh et al, 2020). This survey also found that Millennials have become the largest demographic in pet ownership, and this statistic plays a key part in marketing strategy.

The preference marketing strategy is recommended for the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs vehicle. Buying a vehicle is an extended decision that involves research on various brands, attributes, and information sources. The evoked set (or consideration set) of appropriate alternatives for evaluating a brand or product is the driving factor in the preference marketing strategy. “The evoked set is composed of those brands or products one will evaluate for the solution of a particular consumer problem” (Mothersbaugh et al, 2020). Preference marketing targets a specific group or demographic based on consumer needs through extensive advertising, influential online participants, and a well-designed website (Mothersbaugh et al, 2020).

Because Millennials are the largest demographic of pet (dog) owners, external information searches include independent sources, personal sources, and marketer-based information. “Millennials nearly double baby boomers in relation to time spent on social media: 90.4% of millennials are active social media users compared to 48.2% of Baby Boomers” (Roberts, 2022). This statistic shows that preference marketing via ecommerce sources is the most strategic way to provide consumers with detailed information about the Nissan X-Trail 4 Dogs vehicle. Ecommerce gives pet owners exactly what they want:

- Convenience and comfort
- Product information and choice
- Pricing comparisons that make value clear
- Devoted focus on customer relationships

“This digital disconnect offers an opening for e-commerce brands, including Nissan, to leap up and capture market share. Their opportunity lies in creating a unique brand identity within their pet market niche and the advantage of ridding themselves of middleman margins compared to mass-market pet brands” (Roberts, 2022).

Demographics and Psychographics of the Ideal Target Market

“Dividing the market on the basis of demographic variables such as age, sex, family size, education, income, and social class is called demographic segmentation” (Belch & Belch, 2021). Some demographics of a consumer would be a member of the ideal target market for the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs include...

- Ages 23-40 (Millennials)
- Both male & female
- Single or married
- Attended college
- Employed with an annual income of 50k+
- Middle to upper class

The demographics for the niche market of individuals who would enjoy using the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs would consist of both males and/or females ages 23 to 40 (Millennials) who own one or multiple dogs. “Table A on page 679 provides demographic information regarding who owns what type of pets. This survey is the first to reveal that Millennials have overtaken Baby Boomers in pet ownership” (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). The ideal individuals can be single or married, without children. Also, having attended college with a full-time position earning 50k or more annually. The ideal individual would be considered middle to upper class to afford this luxury within their vehicle for their beloved dog(s).

“Dividing the market based on personality, life cycles, and/or lifestyles is referred to as psychographic segmentation” (Belch & Belch, 2021). Some psychographics of a consumer that would be a member of the ideal target market for the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs include...

- Dog lover
- Family oriented
- Considerate of others' comfort
- Inclusive

- Active lifestyle
- Enjoys road trips

The psychographics for the niche market of individuals who would enjoy using the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs would consist of the obvious dog lover who is family oriented and inclusive. "99.9 percent of people consider their pet as part of the family" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). The ideal individual would be considerate of others' comfort, as the Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs focuses on that. "Ensuring their pet's needs are catered for is often just as important as making sure the children are comfortable and happy" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Also, the ideal individual would have an active lifestyle and would specifically enjoy road trips.

Figure 2

Nissan X-Trail 4Dogs: Interior Hatchback



(Travall, 2019)

Conclusion

In conclusion, understanding the lifestyle of a dog owner when designing a marketing strategy for this niche product is critical for Nissan's X-Trail 4Dogs success. Understanding the problems associated with travelling in a car with a dog and creating a campaign celebrating possible solutions will encourage product sales for this model.

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