

Using Emotional Appeals to Reach Customers

Parents fret about their teenager driving the car for the first time alone. Subaru of America taps into this emotional moment in a television commercial called “Baby Driver.” The commercial shows a father leaning into the passenger side window to give driving instructions to what appears to be his 6-year-old daughter, who is sitting behind the wheel. After giving his safety talk, the father hands the car keys to his daughter, who now appears to be 16 years old. To add to the realism, Subaru chose a real father and his two daughters as the actors in the commercial. As is the case with many fathers, this one still sees his older daughter as his “little girl.” “We knew this day was coming, that’s why we bought a Subaru,” says the father.

The advertisement highlights two of the top reasons why people buy Subarus—high safety and reliability ratings. Safety is one of Subaru’s core brand values, but the company chose not to drill viewers with a list of its top ratings from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Instead, Subaru created an ad that tugs at the heartstrings of parents. Many parents can identify with this commercial because they someday will be handing over the car keys to their son or daughter for the first time. In the ad, Subaru also emphasizes that many owners pass down their Subarus to their children because they are so highly dependable. The Subaru commercial is based upon the theme that Subaru owners have like-minded “values.”

The commercial also addresses teen and distracted driving issues, which are frequent topics in the news. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among 15- to 20-year-olds, and 16-year-olds have higher crash rates than drivers of any other age. Parents have a real reason to be concerned. The Subaru advertisement attempts to get parents thinking about the importance of selecting a vehicle that can increase teens’ safety while driving.

Subaru’s message seems to be working. Its sales increased 30 percent compared to previous years’ sales. If an advertiser can appeal to the consumers’ emotions, it may make a connection that leads to sales!



1. What core values does Subaru present in the advertisement with the teen driver and her father?
2. Why is this commercial more intriguing than a commercial that cites Subaru’s national safety record?
3. Why do you think advertisements that make an emotional connection with consumers are successful?

