

FORD

Ford marketing chief talks economy, AI as automaker launches new global strategy

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Dearborn — When economic indicators flash warnings, companies often look to cut costs even in places like advertising, but Ford Motor Co. on Wednesday launched a new global marketing strategy with the tagline: "Ready Set Ford."

U.S. sales at the Dearborn automaker are up 6.6% year-to-date. That followed summer promotions meant to offer confidence to consumers amid the Trump administration imposing new tariffs that Ford says will cost it \$2 billion this year. August missed projections for U.S. job growth, and unemployment hit its highest level in four years. Federal electric vehicle tax credits will be eliminated at the end of the month too.

Ford isn't disclosing how much it's spending on the company's first global marketing strategy since "Go Further" more than a decade ago. But it's "evergreen," said Lisa Materazzo, global chief marketing officer, with the "appropriate" funding for the size of the initiative meant to ensure the recognizability and modernization of the Ford brand.

"Ford is a very optimistic and resilient brand, and that's reflected in this idea of Ready Set Ford," she said during a briefing. "We really tapped into some universal global trends that we were seeing. And one of those trends that is probably 24 months or more in the making has been this idea that consumers can really feel overwhelmed. The term that kept popping up is called polycrisis. ... People are a bit overwhelmed, probably starting right around the time of COVID: So, health concerns, financial concerns, technology concerns — AI, what does AI mean for me?"

"There are so many things that people feel angst about," she continued. "However, the really interesting insight in all of that is people are actually very optimistic and very resilient when you give them the tools and the capability to feel empowered. And that was one of our big insights, because we think that we do that better than anybody else through our products, services and experiences."

Not all brands are going to survive the transformation facing the automotive sector with electrification, autonomy and digital services all being developed, Materazzo added. Companies that recognize their brand is their most valuable asset and invest accordingly will survive, she said. Ford's Lincoln luxury brand is undergoing a similar branding process.

Ford's new strategy will proliferate across dealerships, social media channels, influencer partners, television ads starting with Thursday night NFL games and the [first filming of "The Tonight Show" starring Jimmy Fallon in Detroit](#). Ad designs are a bit simpler with bolder text and put humans in motion alongside their vehicles, Materazzo said, but they retain the Ford blue color and historic cursive trademark.

"When you have people in the building whose last name is Ford, it's very personal," she said. "You have to treat it with the respect it deserves. And that's why finding that balance between taking all of that goodness over 100 years and not abandoning it, but embracing it and seeing how we can reposition it and evolve it for the next 100 years."

Finding a similar balance has proven a challenge for some brands. Cracker Barrel recently reversed its rebrand decision in an effort to appeal to a wider customer and [reverse falling sales](#) following a public uproar. That move came shortly after an [American Eagle ad](#) featuring "The White Lotus" actress Sydney Sweeney that described her as having "good jeans" generated controversy online as well.

Ford's "Anthem" ad voiced by "Breaking Bad" actor Bryan Cranston and set to air during Thursday night football features a diverse cast alongside a Ford truck, Bronco SUV and Mustang race car.

"There's a campaign, but what is the strategy?" Materazzo said on the brand's thinking with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion. "And if you are true to the strategy, which we are very true to the strategy of the campaign, and this outward expression is an output of that. We think this perfectly represents our brand. It's authentic to who we are, and it speaks to our strategy."

The three scenarios depicted represent the three "lifestyles" that Ford identified it can "credibly and uniquely serve," Materazzo said. *Build* covers work and commercial applications. *Thrill* is for adrenaline junkies like Materazzo who love their Mustangs, Raptors and motorsports and comes alongside the rebranding to [Ford Racing of Ford Performance](#). *Adventure* is the last category representing the off-roaders and the everyday explorers.

"Adventure can take many forms," she said. "Anyone with a family that that has taken a trip, and that could literally be a trip to the grocery store, a trip to take the kids to soccer practice, or an epic road trip. This may be the more familiar everyday application that someone has."

The lifestyles will be reflected in environments for vehicles in new and renovated showrooms. The strategy seeks to emphasize four attributes, including capability as demonstrated in Ford trucks, passion in heritage nameplates, community as a largely family-owned business, and trust.

"That's everything from refusing a taxpayer funded bailout to the percentage of vehicles that we assemble here in the United States, which is greater than any other manufacturer," Materazzo said. "And then it also shows up in other forms, like BlueCruise. ... It's one of the most trusted hands-free driving technologies out there."

Ford in 2025 already has [set a record for more recalls](#) in a single year compared to any other automaker. The goal of the campaign isn't to speak directly to quality akin to "Quality Is Job 1," a slogan the Blue Oval used in the 1980s, Materazzo noted. But the strategy is meant to create a sharp focus for the company internally and externally, she said, noting that efforts to improve quality were reflected in J.D. Power's Initial Quality Study [released in June](#), with four vehicles leading their respective segments, despite Ford overall falling below the average of major brands.

"It does disadvantage us in the form of consumer perceptions," she said about the quality issues. "It is something that we need to be aware of, but it is incumbent upon us then to keep that quality progress going. We know that consumers consider many things when they shop a vehicle."

Trusting that what consumers see in advertising is reality also gets more complicated with the advancement and expansion of artificial intelligence. The content with which Ford is launching its campaign features live shots, Materazzo said, but the technology is shaping marketing content creation and targeting.

"We would always anchor in something that's real," she said about AI, giving an example of changing a grille on a vehicle in an image to provide an accurate representation of product in a different market globally. "At the heart of everything we do is we want to tell authentic stories."

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