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Case Study



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It Takes You and a Ranger: Real-world proof beats polished promises.

Category
A05. Other Consumer Goods

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Q1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & WHY DOES THIS CASE DESERVE AN AWARD?

In a category that lives and dies by newness, the Ford Ranger faced a crisis. Mid-way through its product cycle with no new news, it was losing ground to a flood of 21 competitors who had copied its successful marketing playbook. New low-cost entrants from China, in concert with significant releases from established players, threatened to undermine the vehicle that represents Ford's cornerstone of the Australian market.

Instead of out-shouting competitors with bigger, less believable promises of adventure, we made a brave strategic pivot: from promising aspiration to delivering validation. We uncovered an insight that in a category full of manufactured claims, authenticity was the ultimate differentiator. Our strategy was to leverage Ranger's greatest untapped asset: its 180,000 owners who were already living the Ranger life for real.

The creative idea, "It Takes You and a Ranger," turned our owners into the campaign itself. We relinquished creative control, making their authentic, user-generated stories of adventure the heart of our communications. This approach grew market share by 3 percentage points in six months, and generated incremental revenue, re-establishing Ranger as the undisputed #1 vehicle in the country for the third year running.

This case deserves an award for three reasons:

1. **Strategic Courage:** It rejected category norms and took a significant risk by turning away from a formula that had previously been successful for the brand.
2. **Creative Bravery:** It convinced a major automotive client to embrace imperfection, showing their vehicles dusty, used, and in the hands of real people, a move that is almost unheard of in the category.
3. **Commercial Effectiveness:** It proves that a powerful, authentic brand idea can overcome product-cycle limitations and intense competitive pressure to deliver extraordinary business results.



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Q2. WHAT WAS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE?

Our challenge was to reverse a significant sales decline and defend Ford Ranger's market leadership in the face of unprecedented competitive pressure, without any product news.

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Digging in, we diagnosed a clear chain of issues.

The Business Issue:

- After years of dominance, Ford faced into a soft start to the year, with a YoY decline in Ranger sales in January 2025. This threatened not only significant revenue but also Ranger's position as Australia's #1 selling vehicle, a title core to not only Ford's identity, but its livelihood: Ranger represented 63% of Ford's unit sales in 2024, so if Ranger slips, the whole business is threatened.

A massive market challenge was responsible

- The market had become dangerously commoditised. When Ranger launched, it had 5 dual-cab competitors. By 2025, there were 21, all mimicking Ranger's successful "adventure-capable" positioning. New, aggressively priced entrants from Kia, BYD, and GWM were capturing attention, eroding our share of voice and consideration in a market that was essentially flatlining (Light commercial vehicle sales dropped 1.4% YoY in 2024 – Vfacts).

…and the Ranger brand was becoming more barrier than booster

- Ranger had become a victim of its own success. Its marketing codes (rugged landscapes, epic journeys) were now category wallpaper. Mid-way through its product cycle, the brand was losing its sense of innovation and momentum, a critical driver for buyers in the category.

In a sea of sameness, Ranger's message was no longer distinctive.

With no new product to talk about, we could not win on "newness." We were being outshouted by competitors who had copied our playbook, making our authentic leadership feel generic, whilst undercutting us on price. We needed to find a new way to assert Ranger's superiority that competitors could not copy.

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Q3. WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES? State specific goals.

On the surface, our objective was simple; do whatever it takes to keep Ranger #1. That meant not only maintining market share, but boosting it in response to new entrants. To keep us on track, we had key business and marketing objectives to hit along the way:

Business Objective: Reverse the sales decline and grow market share.

- Reversing the sales trajectory by end of year was critical for the Ford business, and essential for Ranger to remain the top selling car in the country.
- For Ranger itself, carving out positive share growth would be required to get back on top and reassert our category leadership. Ranger averaged 17% market share in the 12 months prior to the campaign period.

Brand & Marketing Objective: Rebuild brand momentum and affinity.

- With Ranger holding such an important place in the Ford lineup, Ford's brand was stagnant. Ford's research partner MarketCast confirmed this via its Brand Momentum tracking, a net measure of brand positivity and progress. Ford's brand needed a jump-start.
- For Ranger itself, we also needed to improve Favorable Opinion, also measured by MarketCast, amongst the people who mattered most – those intending to purchase a new car in the next 12 months.

Objectives summary table

	Objective	Target or Benchmark	Measured by
Business Objective: Reverse the sales decline and grow market share.	Grow market share	17.27% market share benchmark prior to campaign launch	VFacts
	Reverse the sales trajectory	Achieve positive sales growth by December 2025	VFacts
	Keep Ranger on top	Ranger to remain the #1 selling car in Australia	VFacts
Brand & Marketing Objective: Rebuild brand momentum and affinity.	Boost brand momentum	Target: +5 Brand Momentum (vs H1 benchmark of 0) for Ford	MarketCast
	Grow Favorable Opinion	Target: +10% lift in Favourable Opinion for Ford Ranger Benchmark: 28 (Jan 2025)	MarketCast

Campaign & Measurement Period:

- Pre-Campaign Baseline Period: January 2025 – August 2025
- Campaign Period: September 2025 onwards

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Q4. WHAT WAS YOUR STRATEGY AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

Our strategy was to **shift Ranger's positioning from aspirational to evidential**, leveraging our owner base as undeniable proof of superiority that no competitor could replicate.

We arrived at this strategy through a process that began with defining our audience and uncovering a transformative insight.

The Target Audience:

The versatility of vehicles in this category meant our audience potential was broad. Far from the humble ute or pickup truck, today's dual-cabs offer enough safety, technology and comfort to substitute as the family or getaway vehicle, as well as being a tool of the trade.

Our target was the 275,000-odd in-market ute considerers (Light Commercial segment intenders, Roy Morgan Single Source 2025). These buyers wanted a truck to get them through the week at work, and be able to tow, camp and adventure when the weekend arrived. They're overwhelmed by 21 different brands all making similar claims. They were becoming cynical about marketing promises and were looking for tangible proof to help them make a choice. Our secondary audience was our **180,000 existing owners**, who we identified not as a sales target, but as our most powerful media channel.

The Insight:

The steady increase in competition brought with it a slew of copy-cat marketing approaches with varying degrees of sophistication, but clear themes and category tropes that mimicked the major players. Sometimes the establishment of category codes in advertising can act as an example of the 'wisdom of crowds' at work. In analyzing how competitors approach the market and the way it represents vehicles, we uncover common desires and needs of the audiences that buy them.

Signifiers	Common codes
Narrative	Driver and ute embark on a journey, overcomes obstacles and achieves a goal (reaching a location, completing a job, providing for family, community)
Setting	Outback/Remote Wilderness, Construction Sites/Farm, Lush Camping Spots/Fishing, Urban-Rural Transition
Characters	Often male protagonists, rugged Tradies, adventurers, explorers, family, mates/companions
Language	Slogans connoting durability and mastery: "Built Tough," "Unbreakable," "Master Anything," "Adventure Ready,"
Audio	Authoritative voice-over, epic driving and instrumental soundtracks, often with rock or country influences

These category codes expertly craft a semiotic narrative of capability, self-direction and a masculine view of self-reliance. They consistently employ codes of ruggedness, freedom and social status that speak to a core need within the buyer group.

Analyzing these themes in conjunction with prevailing macro-trends and consumer research revealed they reflected a need for control and self-reliance that has become more appealing than ever, amidst:

- Global conflict & systemic challenges are highly visible but out of our control
- Persistent economic pressure locally pressure hampering social mobility
- Declining trust in government business leaders and media
- Strong growth in nature-based activities and holidays post-COVID

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For buyers in this category, persistent pressure and uncertainty fed a desire for autonomy and capability. The category played into this with idealistic tropes and escapist fantasies promising that their 4x4 ute would put them back in the driver's seat of life. Through this cultural analysis, we saw that the category's obsession with manufactured "freedom" had become a weakness. The more competitors promised it, the more formulaic and less believable they became.

This led to our key insight: **In a category of promises, proof is the ultimate differentiator.** While competitors were renting credibility by staging adventures, Ranger *owned* it, with 180,000 owners already living the life for real. We didn't need to promise anything; we just needed to show the proof.

The Strategic Choice:

Based on this insight, we made the strategic choice to **Validate, Don't Speculate.** Instead of out-shouting competitors with bigger claims, we would out-prove them with lived experiences. This flipped the traditional model: instead of asking prospects to imagine what life could be, we would show them what life *already is* for those who chose Ranger. This strategy was designed to cut through the noise, rebuild trust, and create a competitive advantage that new entrants, by definition, could not match.

Q5. HOW WAS YOUR STRATEGY BROUGHT TO LIFE?

Our strategy was brought to life through the creative platform: **"It Takes You and a Ranger."**

This wasn't just a tagline; it was a co-creation model that turned our owners into our creative department.

The Big Idea:

We wouldn't make the campaign, Ranger owners would. Instead of staging adventures, we would find, curate, and amplify the thousands of adventures already happening in Rangers all over Australia.

We would replace polished perfection with authentic reality and allow the people who know best demonstrate why Ranger is the best. Whilst the category would manufacture rugged environments and tout their unproven vehicle's capability, we'll show what real Australians have *actually* been doing in their Rangers.

We don't talk about ourselves, but let Ranger drivers tell us what they've been up to, and what they've achieved in a Ranger. We don't stage a 'test drive' but see what real people do when they're out and about in the world.

Like Pete and Tan, who are halfway across the Oodnadatta Track with their Ranger and caravan in South Australia.

Or Hayls, who takes her dog and her Ranger camping near Mt Buffalo, Victoria.

Or Anthony, who's somewhere(?) in the Finke Desert in the Northern Territory.

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The Execution:

We set about uncovering real Ranger owners and engaging them to tell their stories, with whatever means they had available. This approach required us to completely change the way we went to market, not to mention manage Ford's expectation on how clean, shiny or even new their cars would appear in their ads. We developed a 3-step process that served as both campaign workflow and communications strategy: Call Up - Amp Up - Back Up.

Our creative & production teams worked directly with owners to source video, imagery and uncover their stories, as well as ensure their vehicles (and their driving) met standards for advertising. What we received was truly inspiring. The adventures they'd been on, their surprising photographic skills, and their enthusiasm to share what their Ranger had enabled them to experience went beyond our expectations. In turn they enabled us to authentically execute the entire It Takes You and a Ranger campaign through their lens.

Working closely with our integrated media team within WPP Ford, we carved out a targeting approach for each step that leveraged 1st and 3rd party data sources to ensure relevance of targeted messaging but also inform broader mass-media tactics aimed at inspiring prospects and owners alike.

In audiovisual channels like TV, OLV & YouTube we created various edits of owner adventures from across the country, with Australian rock icons Spiderbait providing the soundtrack.

In OOH and social carousels and digital display, we shared a multitude owner imagery, focusing on their lifestyle and the environment they're in, always with a Ranger as the supporting character.

In owned channels and longer form media contexts, we were able to build a deeper narrative around our owners by interviewing them, sometimes whilst completing a lap of the country, to add substance to the campaign narrative.

Creative Bravery in Practice:

This approach required immense client trust. We worked with Ford's marketing team to build trust in the wider organization to show their vehicles not as shiny showroom models, but as they appeared in the real world: dusty, accessorized, years and many kilometers old, and sometimes not even the current model. This deliberate move away from glossy perfection was the key to the campaign's credibility.

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Q6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL?

The campaign delivered exceptional results across the entire chain of objectives, reversing the brand's negative trajectory and culminating in record-breaking success.

Activity Results: The campaign immediately resonated. Social sentiment was overwhelmingly positive, with owners flooding our channels with their own stories.

- The hero film achieved the **highest creative effectiveness scores for Ford to date**, with a 46% uplift in purchase consideration and a 44% brand impression uplift (Source: MarketCast).
- On Ford.com.au, we saw a **59.5% increase in leads submitted to dealers** compared to the pre-campaign average.
- Our owner-based approach was at home on YouTube, where the hero video clocked 49m views and counting.

Brand Results: The campaign successfully rebuilt brand momentum.

- **Brand Momentum** rose from **-2 to +13** between Aug 2025 and Feb 2026, unprecedented for Ford, and overtaking key competitors.
- **Favourable Opinion** rose +10 pts year on year, a +35% YoY boost amongst in-market intenders.

Marketing & Business Results: Most importantly, the campaign directly translated to commercial success.

- Ford Ranger's **market share grew 3.3 percentage points** in the 6 months post-campaign versus the prior 6-month average.
- Ranger ended 2025 as the **#1 selling car in the country**, reversing the sales trajectory and successfully defending its leadership against 21 competitors, and achieved positive sales growth from campaign launch to year end.

Results summary table

	Objective	**Target or Benchmark**	**Achieved**	**Achieved v target**
Business Objective: Reverse the sales decline and grow market share.	Grow market share	17.27% market share benchmark prior to campaign launch	20.57% market share average 6 months post-campaign	+3.3%pts share gain
	Reverse the sales trajectory	Positive sales growth by December 2025	+1% YoY unit sales growth in the 6 months post-campaign	+1%
	Keep Ranger on top	Ranger to remain the #1 selling car in Australia	#1	You can't beat being #1
Brand & Marketing Objective: Rebuild brand momentum and affinity.	Boost brand momentum	Target: +5 Brand Momentum (vs H1 benchmark of 0) for Ford	13	+13pts
	Grow Favorable Opinion	Target: +10% lift in Favourable Opinion for Ford Ranger Benchmark: 28 (Jan 2025)	January 2026 Favourable Opinion: 38	+10pts, +35% vs benchmark

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Q7. WAS THE CAMPAIGN A GOOD INVESTMENT?

We loaded up our Ranger investment, and came home with a truckload of ROI:

- **Incremental Investment:** With Ranger in "maintenance" mode through 2024 and 2025, the It Takes You and a Ranger campaign represented a significant re-entry into the market for Ford.
- **Incremental Revenue:** As stated in the result above, the impact of this incremental investment yielded a +3.3% share gain, not only restoring Ranger to #1, but representing a significant contribution to the bottom line, representing a significant incremental revenue gain in the 6 months post-campaign.
- **ROI:** With the share growth achieved during the campaign, we can calculate an incremental return on investment of $38 per dollar of investment above Ranger's maintenance baseline.

Q8. DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RESULT WAS NOT DUE TO OTHER FACTORS

The step-change in Ranger's performance was driven by the campaign, not by other external or internal factors.

On Ford's side, Ranger's distribution and pricing remained consistent:

- **Product:** As stated, a core tenet of our challenge was the *lack* of product news. The Ranger model was unchanged during the campaign period.
- **Pricing & Promotions:** The sales uplift was not the result of discounting – Ford maintained a consistent retail profile and investment across 2025.
- **Distribution:** The growth was not due to an expanded distribution network – Ford has 180 dealers across Australia, which has remained consistent across the campaign and pre-campaign periods.

Elsewhere, competition continued to heat up as the market cooled:

- **Product:** From a competitive product standpoint, Ranger faced into new models from Kia and BYD both entered the market with the Tasman and Shark utes respectively. LDV, GWM, Mitsubishi, Jeep, Mazda and Isuzu all introduced or refreshed their utes, and the next-generation Toyota Hilux, our main rival, was poised to launch at the end of 2025, making our growth in the face of this anticipation even more impressive.
- **Media investment:** With the introduction of new models came significant marketing support, with media investment increasing 2.2x year on year according to BigDatr (comparative media investment jumped from $18.0m in August 2024-February 2025, to $38.7m over the same period in 2025/2026).
- **Broader Market Factors:** The results cannot be attributed to a sudden market uplift. In fact, as the year wore on, it was clear the market was getting tougher. With the RBA hiking interest rates to quell inflation as we headed into 2025, also curtailing recovery of consumer confidence according to ANZ-Roy Morgan, which remained in the doldrums, impacting Australian's intent, and ability, to make significant purchases.

By systematically ruling out competitive, product, pricing and distribution factors, we can confidently attribute the dramatic reversal of Ranger's fortunes and its record-breaking success directly to the "It Takes You and a Ranger" campaign.

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Q9. GIVE CONTEXT TO BUDGET IN COMPARISON TO COMPETITORS.

Q10. GIVE CONTEXT TO THE BRAND'S OVERALL BUDGET.

Q11. MEDIA BUDGET ELABORATION

Q12. DESCRIBE OWNED MEDIA ACTIVITY

Ranger owners didn't just take over paid media - their content powers Ford's owned media too.

Owned channels were central to our communications strategy. We used Ford Owner CRM to Call Up owners and spur them into action.

Owner content was Amped Up through Ford's social channels, and takes pride of place throughout the Ranger purchase journey on Ford.com.au

We continue to source owner stories as the campaign evolves, and Back Up short-form and campaign content with more in-depth owner interviews on Ford.com.au and distributed via CRM.

Q13. OUTLINE ANY SPONSORSHIPS

Q14. OUTLINE COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS

Ford Owned Channels: Ford.com.au, CRM, Organic Social (Facebook & Instagram)

Paid broadcast channels: TV & Online Video, OOH, Social

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