



Press release

AkzoNobel
Tomorrow's Answers Today

AkzoNobel's Wanda: The Face Behind the Brand *The creative use of retail concepts to reinforce business-to-business branding*



(Troy, Michigan – June 30, 2010) You see and hear them in print ads, TV commercials and radio spots. You know...those celebrity personalities who add a bit of glamour and third-party credibility to everything from laundry detergent to fast-food. You hate to admit it but you find yourself paying attention to their pitches a bit more than other mainstream ads, as they lend their influencing hand to the sales process. When AkzoNobel Car Refinishes introduced Wanda to U.S. paint distributors in 2007, it caused heads to turn. Not just because the new car refinish brand has revolutionized the ease-of-use in achieving professional-looking finish results through an ultra-simple product and color match system, but because the brand sounded...well, like a female. Wanda got its unique name in Brazil by the brand's founder, whose daughter was born that same year. After

nearly 75 years of strong consumer awareness and market share in South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, Eastern and Western Europe and Asia, the brand finally found its way to North America where it was virtually unheard of.

Timing is Everything:

The strong female association that made the Wanda brand successful across the globe now provided Mark Rapson, AkzoNobel's Commercial Manager of Trade Brands Americas, and his team, the perfect opportunity to build brand awareness through the creative characterization of Wanda in collateral materials, the brand's website, and other marketing communications launch initiatives in North America.

"It's not often that a new product in this industry has the right name, brand equity and market timing to allow us the luxury of using a female characterization to help introduce the line," said Rapson. "The U.S. launch was the right timing to clearly distinguish ourselves from the competition and have a lot of fun in the sales process."

The Face Behind the Brand

The initial strategy of the Wanda marketing team was to launch the brand using a fun and hip illustrated version of "Wanda" wearing a red racing suit and a sassy smile. By 2009, with more than 250 paint distributors on board and promising revenue growth on the horizon, the team knew the timing was right to go on the hunt for a "live" Wanda representative. The criterion was simple and straight forward, the representative needed to be outgoing but very professional and articulate, with similar looks to the animated character, and with a little luck, a background in the auto industry. The actual hunt wasn't quite so easy. More than 30 lovely candidates from several area talent agencies were selected to audition as "Wanda" at the brand's Troy, Michigan location. After several auditions were conducted, a statuesque blonde named Lisa Fresard finally had her turn.

“The great thing about Lisa is that her upbeat, professional disposition is authentic to who she really is as a person,” said Rapson. “Those qualities, combined with her natural beauty, were enhanced by a personal knowledge of the auto industry and her eagerness to learn everything she could about the Wanda product line.”

Fresard, indeed, grew up in the car business. Her father and grandfather co-owned a Pontiac dealership, then later a GMC truck dealership in Royal Oak and Ferndale, Michigan respectively. As a result, she attended all of the major auto shows every year and even served as a manufacturer’s product specialist for Kia, two consecutive years, and Lincoln Mercury for one year.

“I was intrigued by the idea of personifying Wanda,” said Fresard. “During the audition, we were all asked to read from a script so they could hear how we sounded. At one point, they asked me to put down the script and just tell them about who I was as a person. That meant a lot to me and that’s when I really hoped I would get a call back.”

Three call-backs later in November 2009, Fresard was selected to represent the Wanda brand in advertising and marketing materials, and at national and regional trade shows, trainings and events. In early 2010 she began the process of product training, an overview of the history and sales growth of the brand, and a breakdown of the key audiences that Wanda will strive to reach over the next several years.

Fresard hit the road in February to the annual Autorama trade show in Detroit, where she made her debut as the “face” of Wanda—interfacing with hundreds of car industry professionals and enthusiasts. She also emceed the launch of the nationwide “Evening with Wanda” campaign in Florida, wherein registered paint distributors can host a fun, interactive educational event for area body shops, prospective customers and enthusiasts to take part in learning about the product line while enjoying an evening of informative presentations, refreshments, prizes and photo opportunities with “Wanda.” In March, Fresard greeted booth attendees at the AASP/New Jersey Northeast trade show, and in April hosted multiple “Evening with Wanda” events in Texas, followed by an event in Idaho in May.

The Role of a Brand Representative

While a brand representative offers plenty of opportunities to creatively draw the attention of nationwide audiences, the responsibilities that come with that representation are very serious. In a world where product visibility and benefit claims are extremely competitive—and often highly scrutinized—the brand personality represents some measure of risk to the corporation that product features and benefits are being communicated clearly and accurately...that all public appearances are conducted tastefully...and that the representative is lending credibility to the brand in the marketplace-at-large.

Rapson’s team believes they’ve hit the bull’s eye with Fresard. Her unique working knowledge of the auto industry, consummate professionalism and determination to learn the technical attributes of the Wanda product line, have already generated a positive response from key distributor partnerships and consumers alike—producing a quantifiable increase in participation at events and trade shows. In the meantime, more interactive promotions are being hatched by Rapson’s team—all aimed at maximizing Wanda’s national presence and influence through the remainder of the year and well into the future.

Fresard adds, “I really enjoy portraying Wanda at shows and events. Everyone, both young and old, seems to have fun with it and it really does put a positive “face” on a great line of products.”

For more information about the full range of Wanda products and color tools, or to find out where “Wanda” will be appearing next, visit our website at www.wandarefinish.com. For Wanda distributors interested in hosting an “Evening with Wanda” event in their area, email wandarefinish@akzonobel.com for more details.

Note to Editor

Car Refinishes is one of the world's leading suppliers of paints and services for the car repair, commercial vehicles and automotive plastics markets. It sells coatings for car body refinishing, or recoating, to customers including bodyshops, distributors, fleet owners, automotive suppliers and major bus and truck producers. Brands include Sikkens®, Lesonal®, Dynacoat®, Wanda®, and Autocoat® BT. Operating in more than 60 countries, Car Refinishes has specialists around the world who understand local markets and can serve local needs. Its state-of-the-art customer services, color and technology solutions include offering technical and logistical support and the delivery of training programs.

Safe Harbor Statement

This press release contains statements which address such key issues as Akzo Nobel's growth strategy, future financial results, market positions, product development, products in the pipeline, and product approvals. Such statements should be carefully considered, and it should be understood that many factors could cause forecasted and actual results to differ from these statements. These factors include, but are not limited to, price fluctuations, currency fluctuations, developments in raw material and personnel costs, pensions, physical and environmental risks, legal issues, and legislative, fiscal, and other regulatory measures. Stated competitive positions are based on management estimates supported by information provided by specialized external agencies. For a more comprehensive discussion of the risk factors affecting our business please see our latest Annual Report, a copy of which can be found on the company's corporate website www.akzonobel.com.