**Has Toyota's Image Recovered From The Brand's Recall Crisis?**

On November 2 of 2009, Toyota recalled 3.8 million vehicles because of floor mats that trapped accelerator pedals, followed by an additional 400,000-vehicle recall four weeks later.  These recalls were triggered by a car collision in August 2009 that took the lives of four people.  Subsequently, consumer attitudes toward Toyota began to change. Positive brand disposition fell five points to 78%.  Negative brand disposition rose five points to 22%.

But, Toyota’s recalls weren’t over yet.  On January 21, 2010, after receiving customer complaints, Toyota recalled millions more vehicles (followed by another million or so three weeks later) for problems with accelerator pedals sticking in cars without floor mats.   Then, from February through April 2010, Toyota recalled other car models for an array of problems, among them: Camrys for potential brake problems;  Tacoma trucks for defective front propeller shafts; and Sienna minivans for corrosion of spare-tire carriers.

Following this second major recall in January 2010 and subsequent recalls through April 2010, Starch data showed that consumers’ positive feelings toward the Toyota brand dropped even farther—19 points to 59%.   Consumers’ negative feelings *rose* 19 points to 41%.

Since these painful recalls, Toyota’s new motto is “Moving Forward!”—an attempt to communicate to consumers the company’s desire to start afresh and look toward a better future.  But are consumers buying it?  Starch data show they are…but gradually.  From May 2010-December 2011, consumers’ positive disposition toward Toyota recovered 11 points (to 70%) from the second and subsequent recalls. Those consumers negatively disposed fell 11 points to 30%.  Good news indeed! But the percent of consumers who are positively disposed to the Toyota brand is still lower than pre-recall scores.

Readers old enough to remember the unintended acceleration problems that plagued the Audi 5000 brand in the mid-1980’s would probably agree that brand crises aren’t necessarily permanent. Audi subsequently renamed the 5000 model and was able to recover to its pre-crisis sales in the United States within about five years. Toyota’s challenge is bigger since its recalls were recurring and encompassed more than one model. In the absence of further problems, however, the company appears to be on track to regain its footing via a combination of quality craftsmanship and smart pricing.