

MARKETING

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FROM KITSCHY PRODUCT-FOCUSED ADVERTISING TO HEART-POUNGING BRAND ANTHEMS



Duncan Fulton, the chief marketing officer at **FGL Sports**, uses boxing terminology when asked to list **Sport Chek's** top marketing accomplishments from the last 18 months. The sports equipment and apparel retailer underwent a major rebrand based on extensive consumer research conducted by Toronto firm Sklar Wilton.

It's what Fulton calls the "one-two punch."

"Had we not done the exceptional amount of research to understand the customer and understand the exact purpose the Sport Chek brand has in their lives, then we wouldn't have ended up with the great creative and brand position that we did," says Fulton, who was made CMO in August 2011 when Canadian Tire acquired Forzani for \$771 million.

It's been a busy year for the retailer, which also launched a branded credit card and, more recently, a CRM pilot project in Saskatchewan that is the "precursor to hyper local and direct marketing with our customers," says Fulton. The program rolls out nationally Nov. 15.

To rebuild the brand, Fulton hired **Sid Lee**. The agency was very hands-on during the research process, even formulating some of the consumer questions. "Duncan and his team were willing to get us involved from day one," says **Vito Piazza**, the managing partner and vice-president of Sid Lee's Toronto office. "Because we got involved in the earlier days we were able to look at key objectives like creating that emotional connection to build that brand affinity." After rounds of research, Sport Chek uncovered two key insights that helped re-shape the brand's positioning.

In the past, Sport Chek was focused on product and price-driven marketing, and lacked an emotional connection with its consumers. "We needed to build a brand around Sport Chek that evokes love and emotion and loyalty while not losing functional item and price benefits that people like us for," says Fulton.

The second key insight from the research was that Sport Chek consumers share one thing: the desire to be better.

"It might be to play better, it might be to look better, it might be to feel better, but everybody at a level of physical activity and sport is seeking some sort of better," says Fulton.

In August, the retailer introduced the "Your Better Starts Here" tagline with a 30-second commercial featuring Sidney Crosby training in the gym. It starts in slow motion, picking up details like the bend in Crosby's necklace and beads of sweat on his neck before speeding up towards the end—a format Sport Chek will use with future campaigns, says Fulton.

Weeks later the retailer launched its first brand work since the acquisition—a 60-second "anthem" that featured dramatic sporting moments. Each sport featured in the commercial was cut down into 15-second online pre-roll videos as well as full-page print ads and posters.

The creative is meant to capture that very moment before "the better you" triumphs. "When you look at some of the still images we put out there, there's no people in them and it's deliberate because we're letting people imagine themselves back in a similar spot," says Fulton. "That's more powerful than showing some dude they've never seen before in that same spot."