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LOS ANGELES--Lexus is putting together what it calls its "largest campaign in scope and diversity," to launch the CT 200h entry-luxury hybrid.

Soaring gasoline prices and Lexus' need to reach younger buyers combine to make this a crucial launch.

Lexus isn't saying how much it will spend on the campaign, but the amount won't exceed the amount spent to launch the original 1989 LS 400 or the 2009 RX 350. Those vehicles had more of a mainstream media push.

Although there will be TV commercials for the CT 200h, Lexus is focusing on social media, YouTube, iTunes, and the South By Southwest music festival in Austin, Texas.

"We are hoping to hit our 25- to 39-year-old target 36 times over the eight weeks of the campaign," said Dave Nordstrom, Lexus vice president of marketing.

That's big play for a [car](#) expected to account for just 1,000 sales a month. Even at those numbers, the CT 200h would double the volume of the U.S. compact luxury hatchback segment, which includes the BMW 1 series, Audi A3, and Volvo C30.

"It's a small segment, but we feel like we need to expand that segment to be successful," Nordstrom said. "Plus it's a new area for us."

But with gasoline prices climbing near \$4 a gallon in some regions, young luxury buyers may be looking for something that gets 42 mpg--which Lexus says the CT 200h gets in the combined driving cycle. Lexus will push that message in its advertising. Nordstrom predicts 70 percent of CT 200h buyers will be buying their first luxury brand vehicle.

The two key TV spots are similar to Scion commercials in look, feel and music.

In one spot, the CT 200h is chased by menacing, animated black and white cars that look vaguely like the 1965 Lincoln Continental, the mid-'90s Saab 9-3, and the early Acura Legend. The other spot has a CT 200h being driven in an M.C. Escher-esque urban environment. Techno music backs both spots, which rely on computer-generated graphics.

A similar urban landscape appears in a spot aimed at African Americans. A Spanish-language spot feels more like a Toyota commercial.

The commercials will be shown throughout the NCAA men's basketball tournament, on Comedy Central and on cult programs such as the Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim," but TV will represent only 50 percent of Lexus' ad spending.

More unconventionally, Lexus is asking actors to create short subjects that use the CT 200h in the filming. The films, which will run 5 to 7 minutes, will be broadcast on the USA Network--not as Lexus advertising, but as USA Network programming.

On YouTube, the CT 200h will be the sole sponsor of the movie "Girl Walks Into a Bar," starring Danny DeVito and Rosario Dawson, a feature film launched on the site. Backing music for TV commercials for the car will feature new artists and will be available on iTunes.

The launch represents the culmination of a year of attempts to build awareness of the coming hybrid that used the theme "The Darker Side of Green" to show that the image for hybrid vehicles can go beyond environmental friendliness. Interactive movies, public debates about the environment and test drives of prototypes built buzz for the car, which is priced at \$29,995, including shipping.

"Dealers feel that it's a different customer coming into the store," Nordstrom said. "With gas prices going up, we're optimistic with how the car is being received. I don't like what's going on in Middle East, but it's helping with this car."

Source: Automotive News