

Staying on the Road in America



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I oversee sales and marketing for both the Nissan and Infiniti brands in North America. Until April, I held a similar position in Nissan Europe. I've noticed three key differences between the two regions. First, the United States is a single, fairly homogeneous market, which makes marketing here more straightforward. In Europe, I dealt with more than thirty different markets and many languages.

Second, the product lineups of the two are quite different. The U.S. is primarily a gasoline market, whereas diesel dominates in Europe. It has also had a much higher mix of trucks, with pickups and SUVs outselling passenger cars. Recent increases in U.S. gas prices, however, have significantly affected both total market demand and the product mix. By European standards, four dollars a gallon is cheap, but the shock is severe enough that Americans are cutting back on driving, postponing purchases and migrating to smaller passenger vehicles and crossovers.

The third difference is the dealer network and distribution system. Dealers are much larger here, and customers expect to buy from stock. In Europe, people are prepared to place an order and wait for the car of their choice.

Our key achievement in fiscal 2007 was earning a record market share. In a market that fell 4 percent, our share rose from 6.3 to 6.7 percent, and we once again sold over a million vehicles. We owe that to our strong lineup of smaller sedans and crossovers. Nissan and Infiniti offer two of the freshest lineups around, and we are far less dependent on trucks than many other makers, leaving us better able to cope with the recent market shift.

We saw strong performances from several volume products during the first quarter of fiscal 2008. The Versa was up 21 percent, for example, the Sentra gained 8 percent, and the Altima—our best-selling vehicle—rose 23 percent. The new Infiniti G37 Coupe has been doing especially well, and the Rogue is the right car when people are downsizing and searching for fuel economy.

We also welcomed the GT-R into the Nissan range. This halo car has attracted huge media interest. The new Murano and Maxima debuted recently as well, and the 370Z rolls out at the end of fiscal 2008. We launched the all-new Infiniti FX, and the G37 convertible will arrive late in fiscal 2008.

Nissan has never sold LCVs in the U.S., but that changes in 2010. We have brand-new vehicles in the pipeline that I am sure will suit the American commercial user. We will soon appoint a number of Nissan dealers to run dedicated LCV outlets.

The three headline commitments of NISSAN GT 2012 promise a great deal for both Nissan and Infiniti. We will be refreshing and replacing existing models, extending our market coverage with all-new vehicles and carrying out a product onslaught during this five-year stretch. With the race on to upgrade fuel efficiency, we will refine powertrain and engine performance, offering exciting new technologies like the V6 diesel on the Maxima and our own hybrid in 2010.

The zero-emission-vehicle strategy is a key breakthrough, and we will launch an electric vehicle in the U.S. in 2010. Finally, the key commitment to quality leadership will enhance the trust factor any strong brand requires. We are already seeing positive feedback on this in third-party quality surveys. We are primed to build on our past successes despite a challenging market environment in North America.



Maxima