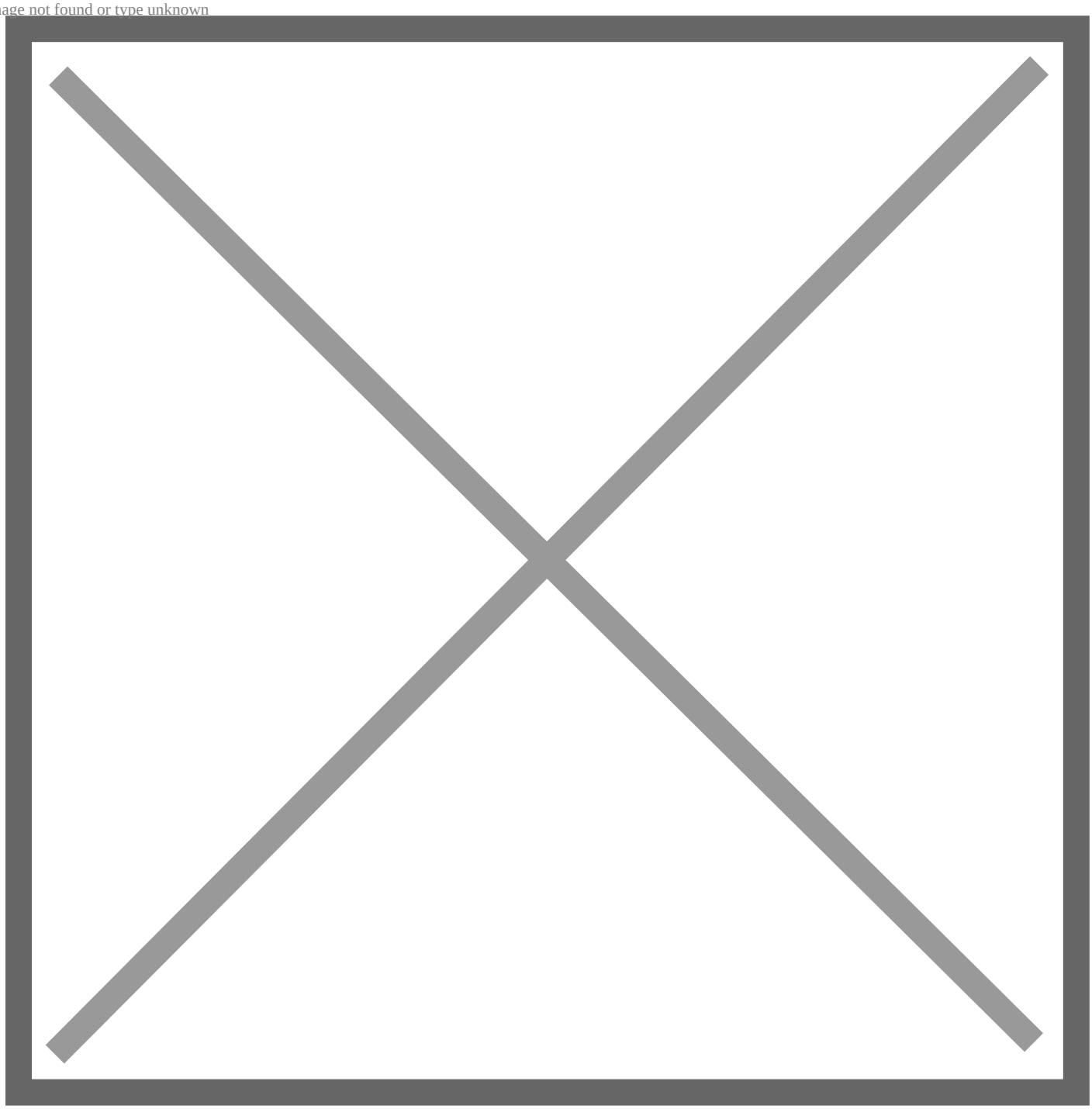
Executive Insider: 5 Questions for Bob Carter

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Bob Carter, Toyota Motor North America's (TMNA) executive vice president of sales, is responsible for sales, marketing, distribution, and customer service for the Toyota and Lexus brands in North America.

When the New York Auto Show was officially canceled, what made the online reveal the best alternative for debuting the new Sienna?

While it was disappointing to learn that the New York Auto Show was no longer happening in April, the team was ready and willing to proactively determine the next best option to maximize success for the Sienna reveal. Even in the midst of uncertainty, the marketing and product communications teams worked diligently to execute a thorough plan, and when we looked at all the varied options all fingers pointed to an online reveal. One that was inspired by our live press conferences but with additional produced video elements that made it appropriate for a virtual audience.

What goes into putting together a virtual reveal? How was it different from a reveal at an auto show?

The planning of a virtual reveal is much different than a traditional press conference at an auto show. While the information and the message we are trying to get across is similar, the execution is very different. Take into consideration the current climate in which we were planning, and it made the task that much more challenging. In a way, a virtual reveal became a movie-like production that required more writing, more directing and more coordination, but again with the goal of providing the same takeaway one would get from an auto show. After studying many options, we ultimately decided we had one chance to do it right by combining multiple products into one virtual reveal – and that's when the "Toyota Spring New Product Showcase" was born.

What was it like for you to have the opportunity to virtually introduce the new Sienna?

The opportunity to virtually introduce the new Sienna was quite different from a press conference, that's for sure! The filming part of the process may seem like the easy part, but it was a lot of work. My camera debut in the reveal video, which appeared to be only a few minutes virtually, was realistically weeks of preparation plus an eight hour+ day of shooting. We needed to develop a script that spoke to an array of different working scenarios affected by the COVID-19 situation. At the time, some of us were working at the office while others were working from home – but we also knew we had to be prepared for that situation to change in an instant. Overall, the results were definitely worth the effort and I am so pleased with the finished product.

How was the launch received? Will this change how you reveal new products going forward?

The launch was received extremely well, and the timing could not have been better for us. Everyone involved played an important role bringing the same level of anticipation and excitement you would expect at a traditional auto show reveal.

In regard to how this success might change our future reveal approach, it's hard to say. While the virtual reveal worked nicely for the current situation, we still see the value in our industry for live, in-person press conferences and reveals – there will always be a need for both virtual and live interactions in everything we do.

The new Sienna raises the bar for style, safety, and versatility. How do you think the decision to move to an online product launch showcases those features?

We think the 2021 Toyota Sienna raises the bar for style, safety, comfort, versatility and fuel efficiency all on its own. What raised the bar even higher were the incredible videos and photos of the 2021 Sienna in Moab, Utah. The same way we reimagined what a product launch looks like, the skillful design and engineering team reimagined the fourth generation Toyota Sienna to support a wider array of life stages and activities. The virtual reveal was a great opportunity for us to showcase the numerous offerings that sets the Sienna apart from the rest – a standard hybrid powertrain now across all trims, an array of new tech and amenities and so much more.