

“We are Toyota”: Jack Hollis’ Take on the Venza’s Virtual Reveal

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When the New York Auto Show was officially postponed on March 10 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) team had to develop an entirely different plan to debut two all-new models, the 2021 Sienna Hybrid and the 2021 Venza crossover.

Unable to physically reveal two of the biggest product launches of the year, Toyota ultimately made the decision to showcase the vehicles using online video streaming. The [first-ever virtual launch](#) became even more special when the team decided to reveal the new [2021 Venza](#) crossover at the home of Toyota's very own Jack Hollis.

Hollis, TMNA's group vice president and general manager, captains the entire Toyota Division, oversees TMNA's relationship with dealers and field offices and leads the division's marketing efforts. Since joining Toyota in 1992, Hollis has seen his share of challenges, but he knows he can always rely on his team to come out stronger on the other side.

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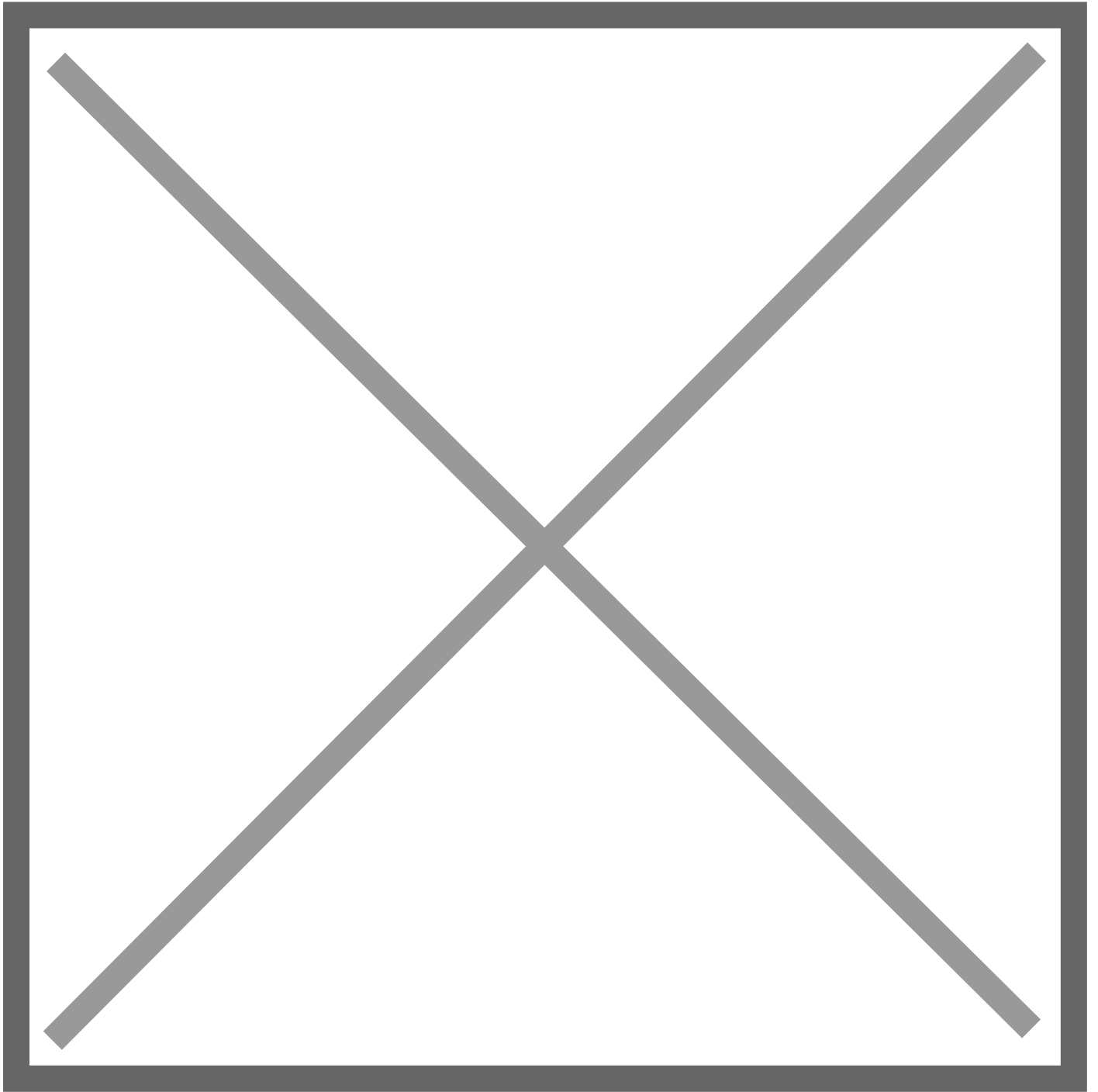


Here, Hollis addresses the team’s decision to implement a virtual reveal, its impact on future product showcases, and what the “We are Toyota” motto means to him.

When the New York Auto Show was postponed, why did the team decide to move forward with a virtual reveal to showcase the new Venza online?

Everything around us was changing. The New York Auto Show was being canceled, but the product launch timing wasn’t going to be, so we had to give this product the appropriate attention and love that it deserved. We

had a lot of ideas about building awareness, how to successfully launch, so we considered a couple of options for both the Venza and the Sienna.



That's where the idea for the Toyota Spring New Product Showcase came in. We wanted to try to do something unique for the new products, but we also thought that was important for our team members, dealers and dealer associates to have something to be excited about in the middle of everything that's happening right now.

Quite honestly, I don't think we could be happier with the results. The virtual reveal exceeded our expectations. When things like that happen, there's that element of great planning, our fantastic team, and sometimes just a little bit of good timing.

You had the opportunity to unveil the new Venza at your home and in your neighborhood. What was that experience like?

It was great. It was unique. It was challenging. For me, the opportunity to do it at my home was fantastic. The unveiling was great because we had incredibly professional people who had 100% respect for social distancing and what we needed to honor in order to get this done safely.

We considered doing the Venza and Sienna reveals together, but Bob Carter happens to live really close to the Plano office, and so we just basically said, "Okay, why don't you do Sienna from the headquarters' office and why don't I do Venza from my house?" First time I heard it, I was like, "From my house? How are we going to do it at my house?" We talked about a garage and this and that. Well, as we played it out, I started thinking, "This is pretty cool." We essentially created a movie set in my driveway.



I think part of the reason it was so great was here is me, a guy in a Toyota racing shirt, not a coat and tie, debuting a normal car for normal people in his normal driveway. It made it very familial. For us, I also think it was a great way to encourage team members who are working from home to say, “Hey, we can even do big stuff, really big. Usually, we do these really big productions. We can figure out a way to still do them, but it just takes a little bit more planning and the execution’s got to be tight.”

What is something that you and your team learned from the online product reveal experience?

I learned that not only do we have an awesome team, but also having so many different people step up for this product launch was really incredible. There was already a team ready to go to New York and put the auto show together, but we actually had to expand the team to make it happen at my house.

I think this experience opened up our minds. We've learned that there's a lot more options of how we reveal products into the future. It just made everybody have to raise their thinking, their expectations, their innovation, their creativity. We raised it to the point where I actually think the anticipation and expectation actually grew beyond what we would've done at New York Auto Show because so many more people had their hands on it.

The new Venza boasts cutting-edge technology. Are there parallels between the online reveal and the innovation behind the Venza?

Absolutely! The reason I say that is because Venza has some of the best new technologies, from 12.3-inch screen, the MID (Multimedia Information Display), digital rear-view mirror, touchscreens. Things like this all tie into what I would call the virtual world. There's such a connection between the Venza's technology-based innovations and our first virtual reveal.



We definitely learned that you can reach different audiences in different ways. Revealing the product virtually actually has some pretty cool advantages — not only going to different locations, but you can actually create a different way to address the product itself. At an auto show, you have limited space, there's a curtain, you're constricted with timing. When you're going to do it in a virtual atmosphere, I think you can take on a different persona and I think we'd not only be open to it, I think we'll probably be looking at all of the of the products and start to consider what would be the best for that product.

So much of the messaging surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has been about how we're all in this together. How does the Toyota team's creative pivot exemplify that message?

What it exemplifies is team. That's what I really want to highlight. I've been with the company going on 28 years, so I've seen my share of unique business challenges. It never ceases to amaze me how the Toyota team not only can pull together and adapt, but how we actually excel in the toughest times.

I think when something hits you, like a pandemic or an earthquake or a tsunami or a Great Recession, that's when you find out how strong your core is. And our core is so solid that when things hit us, it's not that we don't feel pain, or that everything works out perfectly. It does mean, though, that we become more efficient, more effective, more successful. If you look at it from the product reveal side, that's what happened. We listened to and valued everyone's input and came up with a great conclusion. "We are Toyota." It's not just a slogan for me — it's we.

I couldn't be more proud to be a member of this team. We have a fantastic team and I'm just honored to be a part of it.