

39: HQ Confidential: New Product Showcase

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It seems like everything has changed in the last 18 months. Live events and promotions, specifically, are an area that will likely never be the same. This summer, Toyota leaned into this shift with a brand-new, all-inclusive event space hosted at Toyota USA headquarters in Plano, Texas, that previewed upcoming news for select

members of the automotive media landscape.

The result was a one-of-a-kind, multi-day brand presentation – one that very well could redefine the model moving forward. Media guests, most from nontraditional outlets, came from all over the country to (safely) experience the latest and greatest from Toyota and Lexus. Highlights touched on every area of the business: cars, trucks, crossovers, electrification, user tech, safety, design, reveals, updates and so much more.

What goes into a new project like this? How is prep different from typical promo campaigns, and how did its guests feel about what they experienced? Tune in to hear more from Nathan Kokes, Toyota Product Communications senior manager, and Chris Carter, senior manager, Lexus PR and Engagement, about how this unique event came together and what it means for the future of auto shows.

Intro: [00:00:02] [Intro]

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:00:32] Hey, everybody. Welcome back to another episode of Toyota Untold. This is Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: [00:00:37] And I'm Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:00:38] Alright. So, there are a lot of things in this job that are very cool, things we get to know about, but, Kelsey, do you ever feel like or do you get questions from people about, hey, when's this car coming out, or are you ever bringing back such and such?

Kelsey Soule: [00:00:52] Yeah, it's like every day in social. It's all the comments. People want to know, when can we see the whole Tundra or when are you bringing back, insert any vehicle? So, I do feel like a master secret keeper sometimes.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:04] You do, because we know some things. We know when it's coming out.

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:07] We've seen some things.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:09] We've seen the pictures. We know when it's been revealed. But we just can't tell you guys.

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:15] It all comes out in good time. There's always a plan.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:18] Good things come to those who wait.

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:21] Right.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:22] And much like this episode, if you wait, you might get some really good info. So, stay tuned for Easter eggs in this podcast. Just kidding. I can't say that.

Kelsey Soule: [00:01:33] I don't think you could say that.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:33] Alright. I went off-topic. So, on today's episode, we are going to be talking about an event that we had called HQ Confidential, because last year, we released an episode of Toyota Untold that explored auto shows and what goes into them, and auto shows are a key component of any car company's promotional rollout. But when the coronavirus hit and prevented any of those large-scale events from taking place, we realized that we had to shift gears.

Kelsey Soule: [00:02:03] We needed a new event to share all of our secrets, and that's where HQ Confidential came in. In June, we hosted an event at our headquarters in Plano, Texas, giving a select number of guests access to information, interviews and even hands-on experiences with our new and upcoming models.

Tyler Lichenberger: [00:02:19] And so in this episode, you're going to learn all about how we had to put together an event that basically replaced and became our own auto show. Joining us to discuss how this exciting new event came together, how it was received and what it means for the future, are Chris Carter, senior manager of public relations and engagement at Lexus, and Nathan Kokes, product communications senior manager at Toyota. Nathan and Chris, welcome to Toyota Untold.

Nathan Kokes: [00:02:54] Thank you, Tyler.

Chris Carter: [00:02:55] Awesome to be here.

Kelsey Soule: [00:02:56] At a certain point into the pandemic, it became clear that auto shows would not be coming back soon enough for us to share the news we wanted to get out into the world. So, Nathan explained how the idea for HQ Confidential came together.

Nathan Kokes: [00:03:07] Toyota, with our whole Kaizen philosophy, we're always looking at ways to improve and do things differently, and how do we make the experience for customers, and also, for journalists even better? We've been looking at this auto show format for a number of years, and then COVID just gave us the opportunity to explore and do something different. And we were looking at what would be our potential venues for showcasing our vehicles. We had a backlog of vehicles that we hadn't been able to show at the normal auto show schedule like we normally would.

Nathan Kokes: [00:03:44] And then, COVID definitely threw a big wrench in that. So, we looked at our venues, and we saw the Headquarters' campus and the big, beautiful venue that it was, what it offers, since staff weren't able to go to work every day, and so we decided to use that as a canvas. So, we created basically an auto show at Toyota Headquarters and created different little auto show displays for each one of our vehicle catalog, our truck section, our performance vehicle, sports car section and then our crossover section. So, we were able to pivot because of COVID and create a owned auto show, a Toyota and Lexus auto show.

Kelsey Soule: [00:04:25] For those that aren't in PR, how important is it for us to have an event where we bring journalists to see the vehicles to release a vehicle? So, like I guess for the average audience, why do we do this in the first place? The auto show space obviously makes sense because all the other brands are there, and you're competing, and there are consumer days, and things like that, but just with this hybrid event, how important was it for us to bring journalists to get their hands on the cars?

Chris Carter: [00:04:54] I think it's a huge importance, because what we do with this kind of event is we take and command the share of voice. So, think about an auto show, and these press days, typically, any auto show show like in New York, or in LA, or Detroit, there are two press days. Now, imagine you have 20 OEMs that want to announce 20 new models on these two press days. So, divide that by two. That's 10 a day.

Chris Carter: [00:05:22] Now, you've already started doing the math, and you start to see that, wait, there's only really eight hours of standard show on those two press days. So, it starts early in the morning, it goes all the way through the afternoon, like a straight up 9:00 to 5:00, even sometimes, earlier than that, right? Some press conferences start at 8:00. So, you think about the media that we work with, the automotive media, your motor trends, your car and drivers, they're typically going in these auto shows and they're going from one reveal to the next reveal, to the next reveal, to the next reveal, you might get their attention, maximum, about 30 minutes, because you're fitting them between 10 to 12 refills in one day or two press days.

Chris Carter: [00:06:02] That's it. And sometimes, they might not even come to yours, because you might not be the one they want to focus on. So, doing our own event and inviting that same crowd of media, and journalists, and lifestyle media, too, to come to us, and we give them the white glove service, we pamper them, we wine and dine them a little bit, but we really give them a showcase and access to our executives. I mean, talk about having 100% share of voice on average, we would have a fraction.

Chris Carter: [00:06:30] I mean, I'm even being generous when I say 10% share of voice. As a major OEM, 10% at best, I'd say, at a general A show, not the B shows, I'm talking about the A shows, like the big ones, LA, New York, Detroit, et cetera, CES. So, I think that's why it's so critical for us to have done this event, because we literally had 100% of their attention. They had nowhere else to go, but to focus on Toyota and Lexus.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:06:58] Putting something like HQ Confidential together was almost like organizing an entire auto show in and of itself, not to mention that we had to do it in a way that could accommodate social distancing. So, what goes into planning something like this?

Nathan Kokes: [00:07:11] Six, eight months prior, we were in the thick of COVID restrictions and social distancing, et cetera, mask wearing. That was prior to vaccinations being widely used and available. And so, we were estimating, and trying to project, forecast when we thought there would potentially be some reprieve and when we would turn the corners as a society with COVID. So, we projected that summertime in '21 was the earliest we could possibly do something. And we picked the first part of June and picked a couple of dates that seemed to work the best.

Nathan Kokes: [00:07:54] And fortunately, we hit a sweet spot, and that was when a lot of society had their vaccinations, and mask restrictions were being lifted, and society was really opening up. So, we were fortunate that just our timing worked out, but we were extremely happy, too, with not only that, but also the Texas weather. Leading up to the event, we had an excessive amount of rainfall, and just was a little bit touch and go there for a bit as we were planning countermeasures and alternate plans for the event as we were leading up to it, because the majority of the event took place outside in open air, as we were utilizing the campus space to still maximize social distancing as much as possible.

Kelsey Soule: [00:08:43] Yeah. So, take us through some of that planning, because I feel like a lot of people don't understand the nuance and the logistics that goes into, one, an auto show display, generally, when you're at the show, but when you're hosting an entire event at your headquarters, bringing in as many vehicles as possible to get as many journalists', as possible, eyes and hands on it. Like how many journalists? How many cars? How many little stations? How many executive presentations? That's a lot of work, right?

Chris Carter: [00:09:10] The way we originally started planning this, it was a lot smaller than what it ended up being, I'll say that. And it just grew and it just kept growing the closer we got to it, like Nathan's saying, with contingency plans. So, I'll pass the buck back to Nathan, because I think he can articulate how we originally started with some numbers, just trying to have some traditional media. And it almost became a very huge undertaking that I think originally. We were focused on traditional media, traditional automotive media and, actually, it ended up becoming an event that drew the attention of a lot of folks.

Nathan Kokes: [00:09:46] We originally were thinking that we would have to limit our attendees to about 60 journalists. And as we were getting closer, we knew that interest for this event would be very high. And so, we wanted to balance the demand for an event like this, but also trying to honor and make sure we weren't overstepping in terms of social distancing requirements. So, we boosted that number to nearly 90 journalists.

Nathan Kokes: [00:10:20] And fortunately, as I mentioned prior, the opportunity was it was okay because of the vaccine distribution, et cetera, and a lot would be more comfortable with a greater amount of people around them. I think over the course of, as we showcased all of our products to the journalists, it gave them really an

opportunity for them not only to see all the features and the benefits of the vehicles but also to get access to executives and the product experts that we had on staff and really dig in and learn more about all the new features about the vehicles, and get the inside scoop, really, so to speak, and to get some great insight.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:11:04] And how would they have done that before, like via email or the press sweet loaners that we do, but that's usually towards when the vehicles are being built and going on sale. This was more like ahead of time that they got that, right?

Nathan Kokes: [00:11:21] Yeah. There's not as much time at an auto show for them to really connect with a lot of Toyota team members to get more detail about vehicles. So, they got a lot of face time with our teams and got to get as much information as they really wanted it over the course of the entire HQ Confidential experience.

Kelsey Soule: [00:11:45] As Nathan just explained, an auto show doesn't provide people with much time to really grapple with what they're being shown or presented. So, this is another way that HQ Confidential was able to completely redefine what a journalist or guest can experience when being showcased our new lineup. And how many days was it again?

Nathan Kokes: [00:12:00] It was a total of four days.

Kelsey Soule: [00:12:03] Four like full days, I mean, breakfast, lunch, dinner or with wine all the way in between, or like what are we looking at? I obviously didn't go.

Chris Carter: [00:12:12] Pretty much. You pretty much nailed it, Kelsey, yeah.

Kelsey Soule: [00:12:16] Okay. Cool. I kind of figured.

Chris Carter: [00:12:17] It was very involved. I think we had a day that we were focused on introductions and more of the kind of corporate welcoming with all of our executives. We had Jack Hollis, and Scott Vazin, and Zack Hicks, Bob Carter, Chris Reynolds, all the key players, Dave Christ, Andrew Gilleland. And Nathan and I had to shop around. The executive preparation is pretty heavy. Nathan and I had to shop around that agenda I don't know how many times and how many review meetings we had and have everybody ready.

Chris Carter: [00:12:52] And as Nathan was saying, we originally had a scope of 60 journalists, but then this turned out to, Nathan took an additional work, where we work with government affairs, and before we knew it, we had, I think, congressman, and we had state officials and the Texas local municipalities as well coming through to see everything and especially interested in our technologies. Then, of course, our dealers got the word that we were doing this big thing as well.

Chris Carter: [00:13:20] And so, my background in product planning, we got the dealer advisory panels, the Toyota Dealer Advisory Panel, the Lexus Dealer Advisory Panel. The Lexus Dealer Advisory Panel, they came and saw it as well. So, it expanded its scope so much, and our teams had to really do pretty all hands on deck and tag team pretty heavily. They did a great job. I mean, it was a tremendous undertaking between all the teams involved in such a cross-functional effort with Toyota marketing, Lexus marketing, getting involved and strongly supporting. You get two days that were primarily on campus, and we had one day, it was at a track. So, we had all these vehicles out in the track, too, that they were able to drive to get firsthand experience in.

Kelsey Soule: [00:14:03] So, they actually got to get behind the wheel of the vehicles that they were writing about, which you don't get to do in an auto show, because they're just sitting there.

Chris Carter: [00:14:11] No.

Kelsey Soule: [00:14:12] That's nice.

Nathan Kokes: [00:14:13] Yeah. The great aspect of the drive component is they experience the vehicles dynamically. And as Chris mentioned, the track that we used was 60 miles away, so they had an hour long drive out to the track, and then they had an experience with performance vehicles on the road course of the track, coupled with an off-road experience with our trucks and SUVs on an off-road trail that was complete with a rock crawl climb. So, the journalists had a chance to experience the true capabilities of all the features of those trucks and as well as the performance cars.

Kelsey Soule: [00:15:01] So, they got to see the cars in the elements where they're designed to be.

Nathan Kokes: [00:15:05] Absolutely, and take it to the extremes.

Kelsey Soule: [00:15:08] Did they have a professional driver rock crawling on their behalf or is that something you can just get in there and do? Because I have that in my car, and I don't think that's how it works.

Nathan Kokes: [00:15:19] Well, yeah. There were the opportunity for experts there to show a journalist that didn't have experience doing that, how to operate the functions, but we also, at the track, had race car drivers. We have race car driver partnered, and both on the track side and the trail side. So, on the trail side, Ivan Stewart, who is a famous race car driver from Baja 1000. He is a legend. Absolutely. And he was giving hot laps, I should say, on the trail, and really taking the vehicles as fast as he could push them and showcasing what they would do. It was a lot of fun.

Kelsey Soule: [00:15:57] Yeah, that's really one of the feedback that we heard was just the time with the executives. Like you mentioned before, when you're at an auto show, they only have so much time with each automaker, and then the presentations are really not one sided, the executives up on a stage, giving a presentation, showing them and then they turn it around, and then there's the scrum, where everyone literally sprints to the stage, and asks questions, rapid fire. But was there more time for them to spend with the executives to ask these detailed questions to the engineers, the marketing teams, to get to know this vehicle even more in-depth? Because that seems like an obviously competitive advantage.

Nathan Kokes: [00:16:38] Yeah, absolutely. So, what we structured into the HQ Confidential event was a content-generation day. So, we'd built these displays for the vehicle reveals, but then allowed the journalists on the free day to come back and actually walk around the vehicles, have an opportunity to talk with the product experts and really get some of those detailed stories, the back story, the whys, the hows, the what and ask them the nuanced questions, so they could develop stories.

Nathan Kokes: [00:17:12] And along with those at that time, there was also availability for the journalists to talk to executives as well and get some of the back story. And that happened the previous day, too, during the reveal, during coffee breaks prior to presentations. So, just those free time, those ad hoc moments, where the journalists could talk to executives one on one and really get some great insight.

Chris Carter: [00:17:37] There were scheduled executive roundtables, too, which typically, at an auto show, it's very difficult to schedule that. Typically, you can take interviews one on one, but only a few, and typically, it's just to maybe some of our partner media, but I think the executive roundtables and the whole audience being able to have a back and forth with a couple of exchanges with Bob, they love that, right? They were able to have a couple exchanges with AG and COO, for example, from product line, and they just love that. So, I think having a couple of those structured roundtables, and like Nathan said, plenty of time to have one-on-one conversations at coffee breaks or whatnot, that went a long way for the executive engagement.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:18:19] That's awesome. I'm sure they value that time so much. And I'm sure in the feedback they gave, it's like that was probably one of the highlights. But the flip side on our side is that when they get more time, that's great, but also, with an auto show, one wouldn't get to ask those questions. So, was that a little bit nerve-wracking, too? And did we have to prep our executives differently for that?

Nathan Kokes: [00:18:43] We had many prep meetings with our executives and made sure that they were well-equipped with-

Chris Carter: [00:18:50] How did that document ended up being, Nathan?

Nathan Kokes: [00:18:54] Yeah, it was 80-plus page to a document that was cut down from probably 10 times that.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:19:01] That was the short version at 80-something pages, yeah.

Nathan Kokes: [00:19:03] That was, yeah. Our executives are incredible. They're so talented. And their ability to answer questions on their toes is really remarkable. And their memories to be able to retain all the information that we gave them is also impressive. So, I think that journalists see that and understand how educated and how comprehensive of the answer that will be provided to them. They're just really appreciative of that time.

Chris Carter: [00:19:35] One of the things outside of, NX obviously was kind of the star of our show, but we really wanted to make a good attention around 20 Teammate and the automated driving, autonomous. I think that had a lot of preparation. We had a lot of support from Lexus College. They did a great job. We had test drive of all of our executives before we did that to the journalists and telling you two months' worth of test drives before we did that.

Chris Carter: [00:20:00] So, a lot of preparation for that technology. Of course, we had a lot of next chapter stuff set up. The biggest thing, though, is advanced technology, like I said, Tyler. We used the experience center to debut our new multimedia infotainment system, 14-inch screen. We built a buck for that, that you could sit down and play with it. I think the journalists will get to see that at auto shows, will take that around.

Chris Carter: [00:20:23] That was a big deal, I think, for the brand to be able to talk about those technologies and give them a hands-on experience. They got to test drive autonomous technology, the handsfree level 2 mode. They got to sit inside and see a 14-inch screen locked up that will be in our future models. And we've never had a 14-inch screen in any of our cars. The best technology like that, I think being able to use HQC for that opportunity to really say, hey, we're going to make a shift as a company.

Chris Carter: [00:20:54] So, definitely, we use Lexus products to debut, but this same stuff is really a corporate thing. I mean, we're going to be bringing that technology to the rise. Nathan's been working on forever. We're going to be bringing the technology pretty soon to a future model coming near you on the Toyota side of the house. I'm not going to steal his thunder, but I mean, there are even some sneak peeks, I don't know, that Nathan might want to tell you about that was cool we were able to do, that we would not have been able to do at an auto show. The things that we were able to do behind the scenes with our media guest, I think-

Kelsey Soule: [00:21:26] Yeah. Our house, our rules, right?

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:21:28] Oddly, I thought, Chris, that the journalists responded way more enthusiastically about the infotainment multimedia change than I thought they would.

Chris Carter: [00:21:39] Oh, Lexus interface was definitely one of our key messages. I think with interface, we invested more than probably we normally would. It's just such a paradigm shift. And I think the reason they

reacted so strongly either is because in J.D. Power consumer reports, it's our worst performing category as a company, both Toyota and Lexus. We're used to sitting at the top in QDR. We used to sit in the top even in — and now, we're competing in design and we're competing in a lot of different spaces, that comfort, safety, where powertrain, fuel efficiency.

Chris Carter: [00:22:15] We typically are top three in all those categories with J.D. Power. But when it comes to infotainment, Tyler, we're almost dead last. It's almost an embarrassment. So, I think that's why we saw the media respond so strongly, because they were kind of like, finally, finally. So, I think that's why we got a strong response. Not to mention, it's a pretty nice look. If you've ever played with it, it's a slick system. It's nothing like what we have in our cars today.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:22:39] It's pretty cool, and this is the first big major flag in the dirt here for our partners over at Toyota Connected, right?

Chris Carter: [00:22:48] Yeah, they've done an excellent job, Connected Technologies and Toyota Connected. I mean, Zack Hicks, Steve Basra, strong [indiscernible] team, big hats off to them. They have really, really put in a lot of blood, sweat and tears, so to say, to resurrect us in that area.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:23:04] And what about the Toyota reveals? Much of what was shown is still under wraps for the time being. But one thing we could discuss was the reveal of the next generation 2022 Tundra.

Nathan Kokes: [00:23:15] That was a great add to the overall event. It was a highlight for the journalists. There was a lot of discussion in the background, whether we should do it or not, concerns of potential leaks, concern of, is it too early to show it? We didn't show it at a different venue to them? But all in all, we trust our media partners, and it was a key moment for the event to bring them behind the scenes, and show them the upcoming product, and give them a quick walk around, and really, just a chance to see the design. And they are all extremely excited about it, and everyone has honored the confidentiality. There were no leaks from that-

Kelsey Soule: [00:24:04] Shoutout to our media partners, you guys are the realest, because you didn't leak it, even though our dealers did. So, thank you. Thank you.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:12] But that was interesting, when the 2022 Tundra did leak by, unfortunately, someone in the network, that one of the journalists we saw on our Facebook post came back, and said, yeah, I saw it and described the experience from seeing it on background, but still maintain some confidentiality of certain things that he thought so that he added to the conversation, but also held back on some of the key things that he saw in person.

Nathan Kokes: [00:24:41] Yeah. I think doing things like that really help make a connection between ourselves and the media body as a whole, and we take that as a learning, too, and we're continuing to do that. And it just builds trust and solid relationships.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:59] And for those people who listen, it's interesting to see if you don't work in PR the line dissolving between traditional media and social media, right? Most of your traditional reporters are now in social media promoting their work that they do in traditional. Any news that makes its way from traditional media reporters makes its way into social, and vice versa. So, the lines are completely blurred between the two sides, but they work together, which is very interesting to see.

Nathan Kokes: [00:25:31] Yeah, Toyota definitely had a long list of reveals and Corolla Cross was the big new product news, and also, bZ4x, the electric vehicle. After that, it gets even more exciting. So, the new GR 86 sports car, the Supra A91-CF, which means carbon fiber edition, three new trucks, actually. So, two new Tacomas. The Tacoma TRD Pro, the Tacoma Trail edition, as well as a new 4Runner TRD Sport. So, those are

all the new vehicles.

Nathan Kokes: [00:26:11] Then, we had a bunch of special editions that we were revealing as well. So, Prius, the Nightshade version, Special Edition, Sienna Woodland Special Edition and then Highlander Bronze Special Edition. So, a lot of great vehicles then and the journalists were just getting whiplashed looking at it from one to the next as we were revealing them. So, a lot of great things. It's always good to show new product, because it's always exciting.

Kelsey Soule: [00:26:39] Yeah. As you can tell, if we change a color, a bolt, anything, we're re-revealing that.

Nathan Kokes: [00:26:47] Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: [00:26:47] Brand new.

Tyler Lichenberger: [00:26:47] That's not what the people now, Kelsey.

Kelsey Soule: [00:26:49] It's true. We have a new color, you all come look. HQ Confidential was a response to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. So, what's the bottom line? Was it a stopgap while we wait for traditional auto shows to return, or did it go so well that it's going to replace them for us in total? Will we be repeating it annually?

Chris Carter: [00:27:08] I think it is worth it. One thing about this type of event is the incredible reach that we get. Again, I'll go back to having that 100% share of voice, you get an incredible bump in your reach versus the traditional auto show. Now, this is not saying, auto shows are going to go anywhere. I mean, auto shows will still have a huge purpose for consumers, huge purpose for in-person debuts of models. They're still huge to support our dealers and support sales. But I think when there's special things we want to announce, and we want to have the 100% share of voice again, and more of that kind of direct influence to the messaging and the narrative.

Nathan Kokes: [00:27:46] Yeah, it was great. Bob Carter talked about all our new product on TV programs, Squawk Box and CNBC, got a chance to talk about the new electric vehicle and Toyota's commitment to electrification and showed both the bZ4x, the concept, along with the Lexus LFZ Concept vehicle. So, great opportunity to talk about both product as well as corporate messaging and Toyota's new vision for electrification going forward.

Chris Carter: [00:28:18] I really think you guys haven't seen the last HQC, I'll just say that I definitely think, and I'm sure Nathan have some two sense to that, because I definitely think there's going to be some opportunities. Speaking for the Lexus side of the house, we debuted NX, and also, next chapter of our Lexus brand. So, Lexus, we're rebranded, and we were able to introduce that new grand pillars that we have in such a formal and nice kind of powerful way.

Chris Carter: [00:28:44] I think having the opportunity to debut a model, but at the same time kind of announced we're rebranding, made sense that we would do that on our show, we do that on our home court. That announcement is too important to do elsewhere. And I think there's going to be some ground-shaking new products and new brand directions coming to both brands in the future. So, I think we'll probably be in that position again where we want to make that home court advantage, so to say, when we want to make those type of announcements.

Chris Carter: [00:29:12] I'm going to say that I don't think that we're completely out of shows, because auto shows have different purposes, and I think that from a press conference standpoint, we may look at press conferences differently, for sure. I think from an efficiency standpoint and the share of voice standpoint, there are a lot of advantages to do it in HQC. But I wouldn't say that we're out forever. I think it's a fluid thing. We're

going to continue to monitor and do what's best, depending on the scenario for the media and the consumers as well.

Kelsey Soule: [00:29:43] Yeah. Because then, you miss out on the consumer part, right? Like the benefit of some auto shows, having your car sit there for a while, so the consumers can shop around.

Chris Carter: [00:29:52] I think that part of the auto show won't necessarily go away, but I think the press conference part, we might think about it differently. There might be some press conference we want to be a part of, there might be some that we think, you know what, let's hold it, we can save money and get a bigger reach, output by doing our own thing. We're looking at hybrid modes, where we do a digital reveal, and then follow it with an in-person event.

Chris Carter: [00:30:16] So, we could use the auto show to still do an in-person event, even host some media there, but maybe not do the traditional press conference style, might be more of a hosted media style or in-booth at the auto show, but the digital reveals, that gets such broad reach immediately, and then we're seeing the nice combo of having that digital aspect, plus the in-person aspect. So, I think we're going to be studying it moving forward, and I still think auto shows will be a part of what we do, but it may not be the main or only way of doing it like it was in the past. I think that that has definitely evolved.

Kelsey Soule: [00:30:54] We had this big event with all of these cars, because we were on hiatus for a while, right? So, we had a lot to say. We had a lot to show. Do you think in the future, maybe this would be a smaller event like originally intended if there were a smaller amount of vehicles to show? So, maybe it's something that could be done like more than once a year, but on a smaller scale, because you only have three to five vehicles to show, because everything's been revealed. Obviously, the life cycle of a vehicle is a lot longer than other brand's products, so we don't have to do it as often.

Nathan Kokes: [00:31:24] Yeah. I think there's definitely a scalability potential for an event like HQ Confidential. We can right-size it for the number of products that we have to showcase. We're going to take a lot of what we did with this first event and continue to learn, evolve, explore the Kaizen, using the Toyota term, and just make it better next time. And if that means multiple smaller events because of whatever need, timing or just wanting to get the news out sooner, then we'll do that, but we're going to continue to investigate, and research our findings and find the best outcome for the next one.

Kelsey Soule: [00:32:06] How long do you have until the next one? Are you guys already thinking about it now or?

Chris Carter: [00:32:14] Not long. Well, at least on the Lexus side of the house. I'll tell you we have more full model changes coming at us over the next three-and-a-half years than you've ever seen as a company. So, it's an exciting time to be in Lexus. Toyota, I think, used to run it at that pace just because of the volume of models Toyota has, but for Lexus, to have three full model changes in one year is quite heavy.

Chris Carter: [00:32:38] I think it's quite heavy anywhere you look, but we're going to be running this pace for the next three or four years. The whole lineup will flip with the next chapter of the brand. We don't have a lot of time, Kelsey, to be honest with you. It's back-to-back for three years out. We have a schedule three years back-to-back-to-back. We don't have a lot of time, but it keeps everybody in their toes.

Kelsey Soule: [00:32:59] If you're wondering what product PR looks like, this is it.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:33:05] Hey, everyone. If you guys want more information about these vehicles that we just talked about, just go to the show notes for this episode, and the links to the websites will be there, where you can find out more info. If you've enjoyed listening today, make sure that you're following the show

wherever you listen, so you don't miss what we've got coming up soon, or head to toyotauntold.com for all the info and links you'll need. We greatly appreciate it when people rate and review us, so please do if you're able to. And if you have any feedback for us, questions or even suggestions for topics you'd like to hear us cover on a future episode, we'd love to hear from you. Send an email to podcast@toyota.com.

Kelsey Soule: [00:33:45] Thank you so much for listening. We hope you enjoyed today's episode. And until next time. I'm Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:33:50] And I'm Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: [00:33:51] And this is Toyota Untold. Alright, Chris, Nathan, thank you so much for joining the podcast, giving us the inside scoop on all things HQ Confidential. We love talking to you today. You're allowed to come back to the podcast.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:34:09] You're approved.

Nathan Kokes: [00:34:09] Thank you. It's great to be here.

Kelsey Soule: [00:34:11] It's always good to talk to corp comm people. You are our people.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:34:16] Mm-hmm.

Nathan Kokes: [00:34:16] Lot of love.

Chris Carter: [00:34:18] Thanks.

Kelsey Soule: [00:34:18] Thank you, guys.

Chris Carter: [00:34:19] Awesome.

Kelsey Soule: [00:34:24] This podcast is brought to you by Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc. It may not be reproduced or redistributed in whole or in part without prior permission of Toyota. The opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and our hosts, and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of Toyota. Please note that Toyota is not responsible for any errors, or the accuracy or the timeliness of the content provided. Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Resources:

- [*Toyota New Product Showcase*](#)
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- [*Tacoma TRD Pro*](#)
- [*4Runner TRD Sport*](#)
- [*All New GR 86*](#)
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