

case 1-429-303
February 14, 2013

Blueprint for Ford's Future: From Personal Automobiles to Mobility

The crowd was growing restless. They sat and watched the dimly lit stage with great anticipation as technicians made final tweaks to the electronics and adjusted the microphones. Unable to contain themselves, they began the chant—softly at first, bubbling up through the expansive sea of people. It was a chant that David Berdish had heard many times before. To an outsider, in a stadium so large, the word wasn't even recognizable yet. Oooooo! Oooooo! But to Berdish, it was the unmistakable sound of a crowd hungry for the main event. The legend. The Boss. Bruuuuuce! Bruuuuuce!

Here, in the few seconds before his 60th time seeing Bruce Springsteen on stage, Berdish reflected on many of the themes in Springsteen's music. Cars were of course a big component, and this naturally resonated with Berdish as a longtime employee of the Ford Motor Company. Equally appealing, though, were the stories of struggle to achieve the American Dream and messages of the nobility of the working class lifestyle. Berdish loved these aspects too, as he was the Social Sustainability Manager at Ford, a company recognized for making the American Dream a reality for so many of its employees and customers over its long history. His thoughts were interrupted by the unmistakable sound of a '52 Telecaster booming through a wall of amps. The stage lit up, and Berdish settled in for the show.

A few hours later, with the final guitar strum still hanging in the air, the crowd pulsed toward the exits. Caught in the flow, Berdish's mind wandered back to his work. The mass of people slowly flowing toward a packed parking lot reminded him of the world's growing megacities and the mobility challenges they posed. Due in part to the credibility and reputation he had gained through his work on social sustainability, Berdish had successfully pushed Ford to begin expanding beyond simply manufacturing and selling personal automobiles, though this was as much a decision based on social responsibility and environmental sustainability as it was on the long-term relevance of the company. Rapidly growing and urbanizing populations in the developing world needed to move from place to place, but traffic congestion made traditional transportation options less viable. With Berdish's help, Ford had begun to identify as a mobility company, not just an auto company. But the transition was far from complete, and Berdish had more work to do to ensure that Ford would be able to successfully handle the mobility challenges presented by rapidly expanding megacities.

Published by WDI Publishing, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

This case was developed under the supervision of Andrew Hoffman (Holcim Professor of Sustainable Enterprise) at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business by graduate students Rhiannon Haller, Brandon Tirrell, Courtney Yan, and Connie Yu as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either the effective or ineffective handling of a situation. The authors give a special thanks to David Berdish and Kristin Schondorf for their support in the creation of this case.
