

Choose Your Sick Days Wisely

By Eric Konarske

Maybe this has happened to you. You're in beautiful British Columbia, Canada, one of the world's most fabled playgrounds for the extreme mountain biker. The damp air mysteriously carries the music of Lenny Kravitz's *Fly away*, though you're far from any apparent source. As you scream through B.C.'s famous trail known as *The Shore*, your adrenaline-driven, sweat-soaked body does everything possible to keep your bike under control as gravity assists your 35 MPH drive down a narrow serpentine mud-slicked single track. At the end, you try desperately to nail the landing at the bottom of the 15-foot drop where your buddies are anxiously waiting and cheering, but the laws of physics have other plans. In slow motion, your fatigued hand slips from the bars starting a painful chain of events that will result in some cool scars and some even better stories. Maybe this has happened to you, but if I had to guess, I'd say probably not.

It's also statistically unlikely that extreme skiing or snowboarding is how you spend your precious few vacation days. Rare is the type looking for dangerous launches off snowy peaks high above the tree line. It's also not likely that kayaking in brutally cold and foggy conditions without a reliable way home is what you long for. Or how about rappelling into a giant hole filled only with the deep and dark unknown? Again, it's not likely. My guess is that only a very tiny fraction of the population have done, or will ever do, any of the extreme scenarios depicted in the series of ads used by Nissan to promote their seemingly rugged, go anywhere, do anything SUV, the XTERRA (<http://ultra.litpixel.com:90/BoarderPhreak/fun.html>).

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It's true the XTERRA is designed for someone with an active lifestyle. It has a real truck frame and low range 4-wheel drive designed to take you places many trucks don't belong. It has a beefy aluminum rack and gear basket on top designed to securely hold all of your favorite weekend toys. Optional waterproof seat covers keep the great outdoors from soiling your perch. And of course it comes with a first-aid kit that contains all the necessary items for those cuts and scrapes commonly associated with an active lifestyle. No doubt this toy-box on wheels lends itself nicely to the outdoor enthusiast, but you certainly don't need to be a top competitor in the X-Games to appreciate its Swiss Army Knife qualities.

With all the useful features the XTERRA takes with it from the factory, why would a car company find it necessary to use these extreme activities almost certain to result in the cancellation of your health insurance policy to sell trucks?

According to Jib Fowles, advertisers use any number of appeals to help their products appear more desirable than they otherwise may. Fowles divides these appeals into 15 well-defined separate categories. Nissan seems to use several of the 15 to help part potential buyers from their pockets of cash.

The emotionally appealing slogan Nissan uses, "choose your sick days wisely," is a prime example of number eleven on Fowles' list, *the need to escape*. Although no more than a fraction of potential buyers will attempt the actions depicted in this series of

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commercials, they do play on every outdoor enthusiast's desire to deeply repress any memory of their 9 to 5 cubicle life (Fowles).

To a lesser extent, the ad campaign also puts number seven to effective use, *the need to dominate*. Every athlete, no matter how serious, has a great desire to dominate in his or her chosen sport. Not necessarily dominate other participants, but dominate the environmental challenges that accompany any outdoor activity.

Nissan's success in effectively utilizing the emotional appeals of advertising has been overwhelming. When it hit the market in 1999, the sale of 50,000 trucks was the expectation. Squashing that number, Nissan is selling 80,000 trucks per year (<http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/adtrack/2001-02-26-ad-track-nissan.htm>).

It's not known how much of the XTERRA's success is due to the aggressive ad campaign. Images of insane mountain bikers, kayaks piloted by the fearless, and snowboards strapped to those with no concept of their own mortality may entice some folks, but not me. I simply bought mine for the first aid kit.