

'Volkswagen'? Apparent US rebrand sparks buzz as VW eyes electric future

March 30 2021, by John Biers



Volkswagen's new (VW) ID.4 SUV electric cars are hitting US dealerships this week as the company renames its US unit 'Volkswagen'

Volkswagen's US subsidiary said Tuesday it is subbing out a "K" for a "T" and will rename itself "Volkswagen" as it accelerates a big push in electric cars in the world's biggest economy.

UPDATE: [Volkswagen hoaxes media with fake news release as a joke](#)

"We might be changing out our K for a T, but what we aren't changing is this brand's commitment to making best-in-class vehicles for drivers and people everywhere," said Scott Keogh, president and CEO of Volkswagen of America.

The VW press release generated plenty of headlines and banter on social media—but also questions about whether it was more than a publicity stunt.

VW on Monday briefly published the "Volkswagen" press release, sparking speculation it was an April Fools' joke. Such stunts are particularly popular in the German press.

The announcement comes as VW unveils in US showrooms this month a new all-electric sport utility vehicle, the latest challenge by a conventional automaker to Elon Musk's Tesla franchise.

A VW spokesman in the United States said Tuesday the announcement was originally intended for April 29 and that the name change reflects its transforming fleet.

"This name change signals that VW is transitioning away from the internal combustion engine and to e-mobility," said spokesman William Gock, whose email signature identifies him as Product Communications Senior Specialist for Volkswagen of America, Inc.

"We foresee our cars being all electric in the US by the end of the next decade, and we hope the attention we're generating here will help communicate these goals and commitments to all."

The move was taken seriously by Wedbush Securities, which said VW's announcement showed it is "not playing around," pointing to "impressive and ambitious" electric vehicle goals that position it to be the most likely

partner with Apple on an electric.

But in a midday story, the Wall Street Journal reported that officials at VW's German headquarters were "adamant" that the announcement was an early April Fools' joke, quoting an unnamed official as saying "it's part of a marketing campaign for the ID.4," its new electric model.

Gock did not immediately respond to comment on the Wall Street Journal and couldn't be reached by phone.

Also skeptical was Advertising Age columnist E.J. Schultz, who wrote that elements of the announcement seemed "a bit fishy," including the fact that the company had not registered "Voltswagen" as a registered trademark.

"Skepticism is warranted, given how the news has been rolled out," Schultz said.

"For one, if VW was making a move of this magnitude, it would seem likely the company would make executives available for interviews. As of Tuesday morning that had not happened."

Generating buzz

In any case, besides releasing products to compete with Tesla, traditional automakers are also trying to compete with Musk's flare for generating buzz.

VW's plan for shifting away from conventional cars is similar to that of General Motors, which introduced a new brand design earlier this year as part of an avowed redefinition of the company to what GM calls a future of "zero crashes, zero emissions and zero congestion."

In GM's case, the new look features lower-case "gm" font in blue that company executives said was meant to connote "clear blue skies" and also resemble an electrical plug, according to a report in Advertising Age.

At VW, the company has been ramping up advertising for the new ID.4 electric sport utility vehicle model, which will hit dealerships this month.

A series of lighthearted spots released Monday played up the change to an auto that starts up without a traditional vroom, responds to voice commands to adjust the heat and charges up while an owner goes to bed.

VW's shift to electric cars also marks an opportunity to redefine itself after the bruising "Dieselgate" scandal, which led to billions of dollars worth of government settlements and a shakeup of company leadership.

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Citation: 'Voltswagen'? Apparent US rebrand sparks buzz as VW eyes electric future (2021, March 30) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-03-voltswagen-rebrand-german-car-giant.html>

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