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## Struggling GM sets Tiger free

**After 9 years of endorsements, relationship crumbles over the need for more time and money**

BY TIM HIGGINS • FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER • NOVEMBER 25, 2008

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General Motors Corp., racing to shore up its finances, announced Monday that it had reached a mutual agreement with Tiger Woods to end the golfer's endorsement deal a year early.

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Woods, who has won 14 major championships, has been the face of GM's Buick brand for nine years as the [automaker](#) tried to make the brand more appealing to younger customers.

GM said the move was part of an effort by the automaker to save money and by Woods -- who is expecting his second child this winter -- to have more personal time.

The automaker has said it could reach minimum levels of cash needed to sustain operations by the end of the year and is seeking a loan from Congress.

Mark LaNeve, General Motors North American vice president of sales, service and marketing, cautioned in a statement not to connect the move with GM's efforts to win help in Washington.

"This decision is the result of discussions that started earlier in the year, and the timing of this agreement with these other activities is purely coincidental," he said in a statement.

GM's decision regarding Woods comes after decisions by the automaker not to air TV advertisements during the 2009 Super Bowl or the Academy Awards.

"Celebrity advertising is very difficult to actually measure the



General Motors Corp.

Celebrity golfer Tiger Woods entices young car buyers to take notice of a Buick Enclave luxury crossover SUV. He signed a 5-year endorsement deal with General Motors in 2004 for \$40 million, Forbes says. GM says the decision to part was mutual.

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so anything that can't be instantly measured right now in terms of return on investment is going to be up for grabs," said Christie Nordhielm, an associate marketing professor from the University of Michigan.

Woods had endorsed GM products for the past nine years and was heavily associated with Buick. He played a role in launching the Buick Rendezvous SUV and Buick Enclave. "He did become the face of the Buick brand ... and that's not a bad face to have. ... It's a loss," said Michael Bernacchi, a marketing professor at the University of Detroit Mercy.

Bernacchi said he believes the Woods campaign helped GM broaden Buick's appeal. "The age of the Buick owner has been reduced ... one can try to attribute that to" Tiger Woods, he said.

GM's LaNeve said Woods had been "a great friend to GM" and "a fantastic asset through the years, helping to bring consumer awareness to many new GM products."

The endorsement deal ends effective Dec. 31. GM's contract with Woods was set to expire Dec. 31, 2009, according to GM spokesman Pete Ternes.

Woods signed a 5-year endorsement deal with GM in 1999 and re-signed in 2004 for \$40 million, according to Forbes magazine.

Dominique Hanssens, a marketing professor at the University of California Los Angeles, said GM could continue to see some benefit from the association for a few years to come.

"They've done this for some time, so the association in the public is probably there already. To get out of aggressive advertising of the association for, let's say a couple of years, does not mean that people forget," he said. "People tend to learn fast and forget slowly."

Contact **TIM HIGGINS** at 313-222-8784 or [thiggins@freepress.com](mailto:thiggins@freepress.com).

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