



## **A Seamless Online Sale Is it possible on your website?**

A lot of you will remember one of the early promises of the Internet was the hope for the seamless online sale where dealers could market their vehicles on their own website direct to their prospects, select inventory, agree on price, get an electronic signature and close the deal online. I remember when a group of dealers and myself created FordDirect.com back in 2000 we conceptualized the idea of an online transaction and called it a "shrink wrapped deal". In essence we suggested to our fellow that FordDirect could provide them a lead which would cost \$XX or we would provide them with a buyer who had found the inventory they preferred, agreed to an Internet Special price and had provided a credit card for a down payment and this would cost \$XXX.

FordDirect designed the technology, hired the staff, marketed the concept to dealers and consumers and unfortunately it was not accepted by the consumers at that time. The sales volumes were so low that it did not make it a viable model to sustain. We discovered that many consumers wanted to shop, compare, price, etc. but very, very few had the confidence to buy the car online. Has the market changed? You bet. How far has the market come to making this a reality for the **average** dealer? I use the word **average** because unless an idea, service or technology works for the masses it is oftentimes considered just a fringe opportunity and not embraced by the majority of dealers. Let's look at the necessary elements to providing a Seamless Online Sales Environment.

### **Technology**

At a recent workshop a representative of eBay Vehicles indicated that a vehicle is sold on eBay every 60 seconds. By the time I finish this article that means eBay will have sold about 120 vehicles. Remarkable. What is also remarkable is the simplicity with which they bring the seller and the buyer together. I won't oversimplify the technology that goes into making eBay the marketing giant that it is today but we can all recognize that the technology wins because it is so simple. Essentially, qualified bidders can register online and start bidding in just a few minutes. The listing platform is straightforward and before you place a bid you get to see the starting bid, the "Buy it Now" price if the sellers lists one, when the auction began and when it ends and what the terms are for either pick up or delivery. By explaining all the terms in plain English it allows the buyer to understand what happens when they click the place bid button. No surprises.

### **Trust**

We all know a good reputation is an essential element to success in the automotive sales arena. However, we often find ourselves selling against disreputable competitors who will gladly take advantage of consumers if they are not aware. This is actually harder to do online because of the access to information. Let's revisit the eBay environment again. The great equalizer is the seller's feedback score. This real-time customer satisfaction index allows you to read what buyers think of the seller and the scores are calculated to calculate an average numerical score so the consumers can tell at a glance the reputation of the seller. I know when I shop on eBay one of the first things I consider before I place a bid is the feedback score.



Because this model works so well I think it is imperative that dealers consider a similar platform on their own website. Who better to assist you with the sale of your next vehicle than your own happy customers? Of course, if you don't treat the customer right your score won't be much to brag about and can hurt you but most customers recognize there are always a few chinks in the armor and it is ok to consider the dealer if overall they do well. Some dealers use links to the Better Business Bureau and even the website DealerRater.com so they can introduce customers to an independent service that ranks them. My preference is for the dealer to develop their own onsite CSI index because it is more dynamic and if done well can be trusted.

### **Disclosure**

When you look at most dealer's online vehicle listings you would get the sense that every vehicle for sale is a must have, in excellent condition and mechanically sound. The fact is most vehicles have flaws and many successful online dealers say a key to their success is the fact that they disclose the flaws. It makes the customer appreciate the honesty and compels them consider the dealer even more. Check out the listings on DoneDirect.com to learn firsthand how a full disclosure can build trust.

### **Warranty/Extended Service Plans**

Dealers have a tremendous opportunity here to build confidence in their prospects and it should be front and center in the listing environment. In the descriptions you should mention what kind of warranty or service plan is included and then provide a link for more details with all the legal information. I think one of the key ingredients to the eBay model is the terminology "Buyer Services and Protection". This upfront presentation provides the message that they have considered one of the fears of most online buyers and have a method to address it. This is easy to duplicate and you should have something similar in your online environment.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Like so many things in the online world we need to approach the Seamless Online Sale with a heavy dose of practicality. If we make it easy, trustworthy and transparent we will find that many more prospects are willing to take the big step to actually buying online.

Best to you as you develop your online sales environment.

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