

A simple email marketing strategy for Independent dealers

As much as an Independent dealer can benefit from website they can benefit more and faster from developing an email marketing strategy. With a digital camera and an email account you can present your dealership professionally to your customers via email and provide them with the information they need to come in and buy.

Here's an outline of what you'll need to get started:

Technology and Tools

- ✓ An email address that promotes your business name and website
 - The best way to identify your business in an email is to have your website name as the email address such as sales@kainautomotive.com. This allows customers to see you are serious about the Internet and it also spurs them to go to your website because they have your domain name. With so much spam in your prospects inboxes these days it is important that they be able to recognize your email right away. You can obtain business email addresses through online companies like Register.com or GoDaddy.com. These companies offer website address and email packages for less than \$20 upfront and just a few dollars each month. You can host your email on their site or on another hosting service.
 - A second option that you can do easily and for free in just a few minutes is to use one of the email services provided by companies like Google.com, Yahoo.com or MSN.com. You would simply go to their websites and sign up for their free mail and select a email address such as kainautomotive@gmail.com (Google) kainautomotive@yahoo.com (Yahoo – of course) or kainautomotive@hotmail.com (MSN). Although it will not look as professional as an email coming from an email address with your business name as the address it nevertheless affords you a quick and easy way to communicate via email and to brand your business too.
- ✓ Once you have an email address registered I recommend you use an email management software to keep your email organized in folders and to create rules to help you keep it efficient.
 - You may want to consider the Microsoft Outlook software which is available in most office stores or you can check it out at www.microsoft.com. The Outlook software provides you with the platform to easily manage your email communications. Many computers come with this software already.
 - If you don't want to use Outlook you may want to consider the free Thunderbird email management software provided by www.Mozilla.com You can download Thunderbird free of charge in just a few moments and be managing your email in minutes. With services such as those offered by Google, Yahoo or MSN you can actually manage your emails and create folders right in their system.

- ✓ You will now need the email addresses for your current customers and prospects. This is actually quite easy and you'll find most people will provide this information freely if you approach it as a benefit to them. You may find the word tracks below useful:
 - Inbound telephone call – "If you would like I can email you some information and photos of the vehicles you are interested in" "What's your email address?"
 - Lot visitor – "Since we didn't have what you were looking for I wanted to ask if we could email you when we get vehicles in that meet your needs?" "What's your email address?"
- ✓ You can also obtain emails by purchasing space through online classified services such as AutoTrader.com and Cars.com. These services generate mostly phone calls but often customers email questions about your listings and you can have them sent right to your email inbox so you can respond with a call or an email.
- ✓ A digital camera is essential if you plan to email photos to your customers. Digital cameras come with the software program to download the photos to your computer and format them so you can send them to the customer embedded in the actual email (best) or as an attachment (risky). You can quickly and easily walk out and take a few photos and email them to your prospects within minutes. It is an impressive offering to do so and will likely make the difference in whether the customer decides to come in to your dealership and buy. Another option to use for emailing photos if you use photo services such as Dealer Specialties or Diamond Lot is to have them provide you with a disc of the photos they take so you can save them in a file and email them as needed.
- ✓ An understanding of Spam regulations. Your state and national dealer associations can provide you with all the vital information to keep you from violating email spam rules. You will feel more comfortable and confident when you know the rules. Some quick considerations to avoid issues are to always identify your company, provide a phone number, a website address if you have one and most importantly a notice that alerts your email recipients that they can opt out from emails of this nature. Check with your state and national associations for complete details.
- ✓ Creativity is beneficial but not essential. The best emails are those that serve the customers needs and motivate them to come in to drive the cars.

An option you may want to consider is to utilize a lead management tool that serves as an organizational tool to remind you about follow up calls and emails you need to send out to your customers. They can be as inexpensive as \$100 per month for a nicely featured tool such as DealerSight available at www.mjmi.com . Other companies provide lead management tools as well such as www.eleadcrm.com (Weblink), www.autobytel.com (AVVwebcontrol) or www.cars.com (SalesCenter). You have many to choose from and most of the choices are good and their software will enhance your current sales processes.



Database Marketing

Once you have your email database set up and have started capturing email addresses you should plan a strategy to communicate with customers or prospects that have immediate needs as well as those who are slow decision makers or just waiting for the right vehicle.

For prospects in your database you always have a message that you can send once a week or twice a month. Here are some basic message ideas to stimulate your thinking of what you can email your customer about:

- New arrivals in inventory
 - We wanted you to be one of the first people to know about these new arrivals. Let us know if you'd like to come in and test drive one.
- Vehicles headed for auction
 - We wanted you to be aware these vehicles are going to auction and if you want to buy them at great savings call or come in now
- Specials
 - Just wanted to let you know about these vehicles we just reduced the price on
- Purchase anniversary
 - It has been a year since you bought the vehicle and we wanted to say thanks once again and let you know we are here to assist when you want to trade it in or get another vehicle for your family
- eNewsletters
 - eNewsletters are great at generating calls and emails back to the dealership. Companies such as www.imninc.com offer services that allow you to create and manage professional looking enewsletters that are very effective lead generators. These services are equivalent to emailing your website to your customers and prospects.

Email marketing is so simple but is really underutilized by many businesses. The setup is simple, the costs are low but the results can be remarkable. If you have any questions or would like some guidance feel free to contact me via "email".

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KainAutomotive.com is an automotive training and consulting firm that specializes in Internet marketing and sales training.