



Imagine what the future will bring. No better time for that than as we look at the success of the top 100 e-Dealers. Here is a rundown of what future Internet-savvy dealers and dealerships will do (and what some are doing now):

Leadership: Dealers and general managers will lead the change from a reactive culture to a mixed culture that respects traditional shoppers while pursuing online shoppers.

Sales Consultants: Today's dominant Internet sales model, where dealerships have separated their online sales consultants from the rest of the sales staff, will change if dealers are to increase their sales and market share.

Dealers and general managers will realize the risk of keeping their best sales people from assisting online prospects. With so many auto shoppers starting online, dealers will increasingly see the advantage of having their best sales people work Internet leads.

Showroom: Most Internet auto shoppers are not interested in visiting a dealership in person, so the primary showroom of the future will be online. Your showroom location will vary, with inventory displayed on your own website as well as many strategic placements across the web.

Lead volume from your online showroom will depend on the presentation of inventory based on the quality of the photos, descriptions and pricing.

Audio inventory-presentation technology will allow dealerships to provide voice descriptions of vehicles displayed online.

Virtual test drives are available on websites today and can be e-mailed to prospects.

Customer web pages allow them to track their vehicles' maintenance, recalls and estimated trade values on free web pages. Customers like this. Look for these services to be even more influential in building loyalty to sales and service operations.

Just as dealers design and build their physical dealership, they will spend an appropriate amount of time developing their website. Once the site is built it must be inspected regularly, and sales managers will need to maintain the inventory to ensure it motivates the customers to submit requests, call or stop by.

Similar to today's "curb appeal," vehicles displayed online will need "web appeal." This will be the responsibility of managers who maintain your physical inventory.

Marketing: Dealer websites will be vital to your marketing strategy and dealers will utilize them more and more to generate large lead volumes. Key ingredients to a successful online marketing strategy will include:

- Search-engine optimization and marketing. The most effective and cost-efficient method to drive traffic to your site will continue to be through search engines. Dealers will establish relationships with services to handle this task much like they rely on third-party lead providers today.
- Third-party lead providers. Dealers will continue to rely on them for sales opportunities. Online auto shoppers are comfortable with these services, which will morph to adapt to the changing needs of customers.
- Online classified ads and auctions. The largest single opportunity for dealers is in capturing a larger share of the online used-vehicle market. Online classified and auction services will continue to grow as prices for new vehicles increase and auto shoppers seek lower-priced alternatives.

Communication Technology: Customers still appreciate a good sales consultant, and tomorrow's will need to be capable of communicating through a variety of means — in person, by phone, e-mail, video and chat. Some key communication techniques for the future:

- Dealer website chat. Dealers can use their own sales consultants or outsource these services but, either way, they will gain more sales opportunities by engaging the customer early in the shopping process. Video chat is particularly interesting. It will allow consultants to engage the customer “in person.”
- Co-navigation. When a customer calls your dealership, wise sales consultants will ask them if they are in front of a computer and navigate them to and through the dealership website. This “lot walk” will assist the customer, and help the consultant earn the right to schedule an appointment or request information for continued follow-up.
- Video e-mail. Sales consultants can send video greetings that are customer-specific and build loyalty. Sales people will be notified by automatic e-mail when the customer has viewed the video, so they can follow up.
- E-Newsletters. Long-term follow up can be a challenge for dealerships but e-newsletters will continue to progress in quality and effectiveness at generating leads. Dealers will use them for online brand building, and to supplement their dealership websites.

In-Dealership Experience: Many dealerships are experimenting with “one-hour service” guarantees for Internet customers, and this will become defining difference between dealerships in the future.

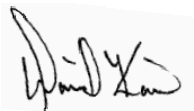
By developing in-dealership strategies to save your Internet prospects' time, you will position your dealership with a significant marketing advantage.

Reporting Capabilities: As dealerships develop their online marketing strategies, the next challenge will be to focus efforts and drive down costs. Companies today provide dealerships with reporting capabilities that can tell you where your prospects live by zip code. The reporting can also identify website visitors by their IP address. This high level reporting will allow dealers to hone their marketing to specific geographies where they have the best results.

The Next “Next”: The Internet evolution is fascinating, and dealers and their customers will be the beneficiaries of the changes.

Creative dealers and service providers are working hard to gain a leg up on competitors. It is hard to predict what's next, but stay tuned and get ready to take advantage of the opportunity to improve your dealership sales and profits with clever online strategies and tactics.

Thanks for reading,



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