

## **Where Dealers Should Start with Online Marketing**

When a dealership starts to consider all the options available to market via the internet, it can become a daunting task to know where to start. When a new radio station comes calling or a new print publication stops by, most dealers or general managers have a solid experience base to draw from when considering these products. But when it comes to making online media buying decisions, it's often a new learning experience, and few have the confidence to select and prioritize the products and services that will work best for them.

Every week, I encounter dealers who are in this situation, and I have come to rely on the following guidelines to help them prioritize their efforts for optimal online marketing success.

**1. Create or update your dealership website to reflect how your customers like to shop.** After reviewing the website metrics of hundreds of franchised new vehicle dealers, it has become clear that most customers visit dealer websites to check out new and used vehicle inventory. However, many websites are jammed with so many pictures and words that customers have a difficult knowing where to click.

I read a great book on this topic called, "Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability" by Steve Krug. The book convinced me that the Google approach of simplicity was the most logical route when setting up navigation on your website: Imagine if your customers had to navigate through several barriers to see your inventory on your lot. Some would actually persevere, but many others would give up before they got there. This is what happens when customers visit your site and are greeted with confusing navigation. So start by cleaning up your home page. Make it easy for users to search for what they want and you'll definitely get more leads. A nice by-product of this is that the leads that close the easiest are those that are coming to you through your dealership website.

**2. Sign up for your manufacturer's lead generation program, if available.** In the last few years, Ford and GM have lead the charge to drive consumers through their website properties to dealerships that can fulfill the auto shoppers' buying needs. In addition, several manufacturers have developed lead aggregator models whereby they purchase leads from other online sources that are brand-specific, and then resell them to their dealers. This provides a dealer with a steady flow of leads but limits them to those in their manufacturer-specified market area.

If you are a dealer who wants leads outside this set market, then try reaching out to a third-party lead aggregator.

**3. Optimize your dealership website for search engines (SEO) and consider search engine marketing (SEM).** Generating home-grown leads is critical to improving your lead volume and close rate. You can have the greatest website in the world, but you can't reap the benefits if customers never see it.

In today's environment, a website that is not optimized may have a smooth running engine, but it never gets in gear. So, first, you want to make sure your website builder has done all it can to make it easy for search engines to find your website. Some want to charge for this service (which I feel is inappropriate, since it is like selling a vehicle without the transmission). Setting up alternate text for photos and individual page titles is a quick and easy way to improve your site for search, as is adding strategic wording across the bottom of each page that describes your dealership offerings.

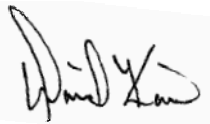
SEM is a social science, rather than a "pure" science, as you are trying to determine behavior-- what your prospects will type when they are searching for a new or used vehicle. One might type "New Ford pickups in Lexington, KY," while another will type "Ford trucks new in Lexington". Yes, these are very similar, but if you don't include both in your search term keywords list, you will likely not show up at the top of SEM rankings.

While in-house SEO is certainly an option, SEM is much more complex. And because of its nuances, I think it is safer and kinder to your financial and personnel budget to use a company that specializes in these services, rather than trying to tackle them yourself.

**4. Find a third-party lead provider and online classifieds service.** This is the next priority and can be the link to actual sales and profit growth when you set them up and manage them correctly. Do your homework and compare the offerings of several services to see which one will work best for your dealership. Make sure you do a thorough evaluation of the available tools that will give you the best possible return on your investment. And with the pre-owned listings, be sure you have the capacity to use multiple photos, detailed and personally written descriptions and on-the-market pricing.

As the internet matures, no doubt we will see many more elements that can increase your sales. Following this marketing priority list should give you a good start toward achieving a solid return on your investment, and I will continue to explore and report new options that will help you take advantage of all the web has to offer.

Thanks for reading,



President  
KainAutomotive.com  
[david@kainautomotive.com](mailto:david@kainautomotive.com)  
[www.kainautomotive.com](http://www.kainautomotive.com)  
859-533-2626