



## Long-term Internet Follow-up

### “Relevance and Timing”

One of the greatest challenges faced by dealerships is discovering the right mix of email communications to stimulate a customer to action. This is always part of a lively discussion among Internet managers at workshops where I often hear “I wish they would just let me know they are receiving my messages” or “I would just like them to respond at all – even if it is to tell me no”. To these statements the best answer is to try to think like your customer.

Thinking like the customer is easier said than done but let’s start with your own experience in reviewing your personal email inbox. The typical email inbox consists of a variety of offers from obscure companies offering you anything from low rate mortgages to get rich quick schemes. Admittedly, spam filters have improved this but nevertheless some get by and then there are some from companies that we actually want to hear from even if we don’t want to act now. We often categorize them as “friend” on our filters. This allows us to scan the email quickly and see if there is an offer that is *relevant* to our needs.

*Relevance is the key* to how the email will impact the consumer. Consider how many advertising impressions the average consumer is exposed to each day alone. In researching for this article I found opinions ranging from **850 commercial impressions** (Arthur Anderson “Retailing Issues Letter” author Kenneth Banks – Volume 4 Issue 6 Page 1) to **3000 daily advertising messages** (“Data Smog Surviving the Information Glut” author David Shenk - HarperEdge, 1997). To say the least, this is probably overwhelming for the average consumer to absorb so they adapt by “filtering” these impressions by relevance. If it is relevant they will read it and if it is not they will ignore it.

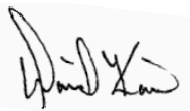
*Timing comes next* and is equal to relevance. The filter for relevance may allow the message to get through but if the timing is not right the consumer is not compelled to act. In considering the effect of timing once again you may want to review your own experience. You may want an “iPod” digital music player enough to motivate you to do some research through various means – visit the website, visit a store or ask a friend to borrow their player. Now that your filter is open to this product you will likely notice that they are everywhere you look – on television, radio, billboards, email - and your desire to purchase is increasing each day. However, you are setting aside a few bucks each day to make the purchase and you don’t have the amount needed yet. Your purchase depends of when you’ve set aside enough disposable income. As a result, the ads you see are relevant but the timing is not right. The consumer typically responds to advertising best when it is relevant and the timing is right!

This concept applies to a dealership Internet marketing. When consumers submit a request for information via your website or a lead aggregator they seldom communicate what stage they are actually in despite radial buttons and check boxes provided to gather this data. We may wrongly assume if they went to the trouble to submit a request they are almost ready to buy. This may or may not be the case. However, we can safely assume that the information they are requesting is relevant to them even if their timing is not now. Passing the relevance test is all you need to know what to do next.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Subject Line** – Your subject line must survive the delete button. Make sure it is relevant to the consumer. Your chances of having the email opened go up considerably if the subject is relevant. Even if they don't open the email, you gain an advertising impression if your subject includes the type of vehicle they are considering plus your dealership name. Remember, this is a marathon and not a sprint with some customers.
- **Logo** – Second to your subject line is your logo when trying to create a lasting impression on your consumer. Consider your dealership stationary or your business cards – both have your logo on them and afford you the benefit of a quick impression on your customer. I'm certain you would not consider mailing a letter to your customer on plain white paper in a plain white envelope with a business card without a logo. Each email you send should include your logo.
- **Message** – Variety and value are important when considering your message. Sending boring and wordy messages will not likely motivate the consumer. Get to the point, use graphics, bullet points and customize the message as much as possible. By all means never tell the customer that you are "putting them in an inactive status" or "removing them from follow-up" or "deleting them from your database". This may stimulate a few to the respond but it alienates many who are waiting for the right time to buy. It also makes you out to be a liar if you continue to send them additional emails. Be creative and focus on benefit for the consumer.

Finally, be patient and use a good lead management tool. When your message is relevant to the consumer and the timing is right – they will buy!



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