

# Simplify the online car buying journey for the best customer experience

PEOPLE WANT THEIR ONLINE EXPERIENCE TO BE SIMPLE AND TO BE ABLE TO CONTROL THEIR RESEARCH



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The Internet is a tool we all use to find the perfect products and services to suit our lifestyles. Each time I endeavour to find the right item, I see it as a journey. Sometimes this journey is easy, even fun. Other times, it can be so difficult that I just give up.

This is nothing new, and the automotive sector knows it; yet, it is still trying to figure out how to best approach the issue. More forms, more third party tools and now chat. It was never anyone's intention to create this disjointed experience. Instead, it was simply the evolution of the space over time.

Over my 21 years in the industry I've had a front row seat that has allowed me to observe how car dealers have embraced technology.

We all recognize that a certain standard of customer experience has been established. Dealers strive to deliver the same quality of customer experience online as they have been delivering inside the dealership for years. Consumers expect an experience that feels like Amazon. Seventy-seven per cent of customers start their shopping journey with Amazon or Google. Make no mistake, the likes of Amazon and other consumer giants are the ones your dealership is being compared to online.

Just over a year ago, I was on the other side of the equation, watching my husband go through the process of shopping for and buying a vehicle. What I quickly realized was this experience did not look or feel familiar to him.

We are all very aware that consumers are now expert online shoppers. You are likely one yourself and know when the online journey does not work for you. The moment it feels uncomfortable, redundant, prying or confusing, you log off and move onto the next website. That instinct to 'move on' is precisely the battle you as a dealer are engaged in.

Your first step should be to make your website smart. Your site should learn and adapt based on the actions the customer makes. You then can personalize the experience for every customer. Make it interactive. Just like you employ a sales team to consult with potential vehicle buyers and assist them in the decision making process, your website should do the same. Your website should be able to learn and remember the visitor. When they return they are greeted and treated like a returning customer to your dealership.

That is the goal, to aim for an online customer experience that is easy, provides value to the consumer, and promotes trust and reliability so that customers stay with your website and come back. Customers are demanding the ability to control their research and buying experience. They will gladly share information about themselves if they know it's for helping their research into purchasing a new vehicle from your dealership.

That being said, beware of vendors who approach proclaiming they can make leads rain down upon your dealership. You are not looking for huge volumes of leads. Instead, what you want are quality leads, con-

sumers who are engaged with your dealer website and spend time there.

A key metric to watch and improve upon is the time spent on your website. Total unique visitors are akin to total leads. What's more important is that you keep those visitors engaged in the journey and performing tasks on your site that add value to both the shopper and the dealership.

It is advisable to avoid lead traps. People hate them and will vacate your site 9.9 times out of 10. They do not want to be forced to hold a call with a sales rep. They came online to find information. Data shows that an average consumer leaves a dealer's website 40 seconds after filling out a static form. I suggest collecting personal information only once and provide value back to the client for doing so, in the form of a valuation, for example, or booking a test drive of a vehicle they are interested in.

Today's technology allows you to take all of your interactive experience, your calls to action, and connect them together to keep building on the customer experience. A customer should be able to engage with whatever experience they see value in, and from there the website should adapt and serve up the next logical step in the research journey. This would suggest finding solutions with the tools your dealership needs that work together in one suite.

The right customer experience will inherently build trust. Your software should have a reputation for reliability. This trust and reliability are the cornerstones of online customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is the pinnacle of what will make your dealership successful.

You don't need a new website to create a great experience. Website providers offer the infrastructure to house your inventory, provide navigation and set up for excellent search engine optimization. The experience piece is what comes on top of this infrastructure and what you can acquire from a great third party vendor.

Choosing the right vendor is critical. You need to put serious thought into who you will partner with to execute your online marketing and technology strategy. If you have not already, consider hiring a digital marketing manager or expert consultant to help you wade through the mountain of potential suppliers and options. If you don't have the technical acumen internally, you could quickly find that this endeavour costs too much money, time and could potentially fail.

Aim for established firms with a reputation for understanding the car business as well as programming software that is stable, configurable and simple to implement. Seek out a company that has easy access to representatives to assist you in the entire journey to success, not just the sale.

Carefully plan out what you need, what you have to spend and who is the right partner. This isn't really about technology; it's about providing a connected experience for the consumer. Invest to give people what they want and they will reward you with their business. **AW**

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