

DIGITAL MARKETING

Electronic Mystery Shopper

Ever wondered what you look like online?

If you truly want to evaluate how your dealership works in the virtual world, there's only one thing to do, according to Joe Webb, President of DealerKnows Consulting, and that's to mystery shop yourself.

Speaking at the recent Trillium Automobile Dealers Association Digital Day conference, Webb advised dealers to fabricate an account and see what their team is sending out on the dealership's behalf. "Figure out what you're known for," he said. "You need to have a value proposition – why should someone buy from you as opposed to the dealer down the street?"

He warned against simply promoting your dealership as either a family run business, or one with great customer service. "You need to clarify what you mean by that," Webb said. "A family run grocery store can be more expensive. Perhaps you want to say that, as a family run dealership, if a customer has an issue, the owner is always available and on site to speak with you directly."

Lead mix

It's crucial to understand your lead mix. "In the United States, we pay a lot for third-party leads," Webb observed. "But in Canada, you have OEM leads, website leads and leads from companies like Auto Trader that have information based on specific vehicles," he said. "You want about 75 percent of your lead mix to be from your website, for specific units in your inventory. Those are what you'll be able to capitalize on the most."

In the digital world, timing is everything. In the beginning, an hour was an appropriate time to respond to a customer email. But the industry standard has changed as years progressed, decreasing to thirty minutes, then fifteen, and now five.

"Research shows that if you can get back to the customer in five minutes, you can quadruple your chances," said Webb. "Think about the structure you need to have to get back to every single lead in five minutes. If you're just distributing leads on the showroom floor, it might not be happening."

He advised deconstructing leads whenever possible. "Google the customer's name, find out where they work, and offer to take the vehicle to their place of business," Webb said. "Look for information that will help



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Joe Webb, President,
DealerKnows Consulting

you build a rapport with them. It takes 30 seconds to Google their name, may be a minute to do some more research. The more you know your customer, the better your chances of putting them in the right vehicle."

Most consumers are looking for pricing, so it's crucial to get pricing in your team's hands as fast as possible so they can get it to the consumer. Ensure that they have the authority to send out prices, so they don't have to ask the sales manager. "Think about how quickly you can get customers' information," said Webb. "Your sales managers are important people because they know how to sell customers. But they can either slow down or speed up a sale."

Encourage conversation

Email communication needs to be able to survive spam. Since Canada has some of the toughest spam laws worldwide, it's easy to wind up in the spam box instead of the inbox. The first email that goes out should have no links, no images, no different fonts, no bold or italics, no exclamation marks, and no use of the words "free" or "sale." "You want to get that email into your consumer's inbox, so they know you're listening," observed Webb.

A potential customer will take the time, on average, to look at seven dif-

ferent vehicles on your website before selecting one. "And every page may have your phone number, but they won't call," said Webb. "They'll find the vehicle they want. And they'll fill in the email form. If you phone them back, that's showing them that you're not listening." To show them respect, use the same means of communication as they did to contact you. "If they email you, email them back," he said. "At the very least, you can use the email to set up a phone call."

Everyone's a manager

Anyone who's communicating with a customer should call themselves a manager, according to Webb. "The customer should feel like they're dealing with an authority figure," he said. "Your staff should have titles like Internet manager or customer care manager."

When you're mystery shopping your dealership, find out how your team responds to email inquiries. Any email that answers a customer inquiry should also contain questions to spur further conversation. "Most emails are monologues," said Webb. "Thirty-nine percent of all emails never ask a single question. For example, you can ask the customer if they'd like information about financing or leasing."

Statistics show that customers spend 17 hours doing research online. After that, they choose four brands, whittle it down to two, and then email about four dealerships. "In your first email response, tell them what they've asked for, with some additional options," said Webb. "In your second email, sell yourself with video and pictures."

Sell your dealership

Webb believes that differentiating your dealership requires celebrating your people. "Your competitor doesn't have your people on their floor," he said. "Build value in your process by building up your people." He also advises to build value in your dealership process, so that when customers finally come to the dealership, there's no mystery."

It boils down to maximizing the leads you already have, and improving communications to sell more cars – not spend more money. "You'll probably be able to trim budgets and still sell more cars," said Webb. "Build value by finding out what makes you special. Personalize the process, and you'll be able to better market yourself to online shoppers." ❖

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