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Internet Marketing



Mark Dubis

At no other time in history have auto dealers had more options, channels, and media to promote their business to the public. And while these choices are great they can also be confusing, frustrating, and at times expensive.

“Don’t be afraid of posting all reviews, as it says you are honest with your audience and work to correct situations when they come up. When you offer a great customer experience and prove it via honest and unfiltered customer reviews you tap into a powerful marketing tool called the *truth*.”

Technology has brought us the internet, mobile smartphones, portable tablet PCs and ultra-fast wi-fi networks. Most of us couldn’t live without these items, but over the past five years a disturbing trend has emerged in the use of these by the auto industry.

We have gotten lazy when it comes to real community prospecting and brand building and have instead relied on web marketing to drive customers in the door. In essence we are using technology to dis-intermediate relationships instead of using it to build and strengthen relationships.

Because we are not asking our sales team members to build their local networks they have lost real connections that incubate the “word-of-mouth” buzz which builds a renewable portfolio of clients. Instead of hiring a salesperson with a Facebook network of 500+ connections; hire someone active in the community who is part of a local civic group engaged in

non-profit activities and possibly active with their local house of worship. These connections will bear fruit and future sales.

Dealers need to ramp up their marketing game, and stop using techniques and messaging that continues to make the public skeptical about how they will be treated at the local dealerships. Bottom line: most customers don’t trust us!

I would like to state right now that being honest, trustworthy and offering a great customer experience at your dealership does *not* mean you have to lose money or “give away your profit.” When I ask auto

dealers about their happiest customers they often say they were transactions where the dealership made a healthy profit. Usually these are not the customers coming in on the price ad and asking for a mini-deal on a high demand vehicle. So if our biggest grosses are our happiest customers, why are we still talking price, price, price in our advertising?

I believe you can only make a healthy profit when there is a relationship in place. This means the customer feels comfortable with the salesperson, the process, and is being treated in a fair and respectful fashion.

In today’s wired world every business on the internet is naked. Transparency is the watchword of the day. David Carr, a writer for the New York Times said it best, “... we’re living in a golden age where the internet is kind of self-cleaning oven and the truth comes out.”

We can’t keep treating customers like they are stupid. When you visit a website for

a dealership in the New York City area selling over 10,000 cars a year, and they feature 31 pages of customer reviews which are all four or five star ratings, you know site visitors are seeing manipulated and filtered reviews.

Sir Winston Churchill said, “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.”

Don’t be afraid of posting all reviews, as it says you are honest with your audience and work to correct situations when they come up. When you offer a great customer experience and prove it via honest and unfiltered customer reviews you tap into a powerful marketing tool called the *truth*. And as you may have heard, it will set you free, and in my opinion improve your profitability.

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problems on their own. The inspection can pinpoint customers who are currently or soon to be in need of brake service and help alert customers to the condition of their brakes. Utilize follow-up communications, because the brake service may not be perceived as immediately urgent to customers, it is crucial to get them back in your store.

It’s time to start winning with the “big three”—battery, brakes, and tires. Attacking these services head on will put your dealer back on top, gaining the millions of dollars lost in years past. Stop the passive sales approach and start identifying these needy customers!

Mike Martinez is chief marketing officer of DMEautomotive, the industry leader in science-based, results-driven automotive marketing that provides a range of marketing services to the biggest and most innovative automotive organizations in the industry. For more information, email dme@dealermark.com.