

Mastering leads

Digital lead management has evolved as its own discipline. Are dealers adapting to this new digital landscape?

BY CARINA OCKEDAHL

Digital leads are a critical component of dealership success, and some dealers are struggling to adapt their response to meet consumer expectations.

The problem is that lead management today is very structured and not nearly as intuitive and adaptive to the consumer as it probably should be, according to Alan Bird, President & Chief Executive Leader at SCI Marketview, a provider of digital lead management solutions and training.

“There are processes set up for consumers to experience, and those processes are structured really around what the dealer or the OEM requires,” says Bird.

SCI Marketview has processed more than 150 million leads since 2006 and 99 per cent of those leads are structured based on the lead type, according to Bird. Whether it comes from a dealer, an OEM or a third party source, there is a process the consumer goes through that is defined by these sources.

But as consumer needs evolve, so too should this process. And that process should be adaptive to the customer experience when they need it and how they need it, says Bird.

Imagine this scenario: in a perfect world, when a consumer wants to buy a car, they get a credit approval, choose the vehicle they want, and then they head over to the dealership to pick up the car — all in that order.

In reality, the customer may not get the credit approval before looking for a new car. And they may not know exactly when or where they want to get it done either.

Maybe they want to do it before starting the whole car-buying process or in the middle of the process.

They might want to look at aftermarket items and extended warranty after the vehicle has already been purchased, but before they pick up the car at the dealership.



For dealers to really capitalize on the growing number of consumers that engage digitally before entering the dealership, they will need to have the right tools, create a more consumer-oriented process, and modernize their best practices.

And what if they want to do it all from the convenience of their home or office? It's also possible that the consumer will want to do their own research rather than having someone they don't know sell it to them.

This scenario can easily be replaced by things like vehicle inventory and specifications, so it's important that dealers enter the consumer's world to understand what they want.

“I think that we need to make sure we adapt to the consumer, and that it's not our expectation that the consumer adapt to us,” says Bird.

MODERNIZING LEAD MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

The process aside, dealers also need to tackle the issue of best practices — which desperately needs to be modernized. This is because some dealers still don't treat potential customers online as well as they do when they walk in the dealership.

“We have found through dealerships and mystery shopping training that we did extensively across North America, that dealerships today don't deal with digital leads like they do physical leads,” says Bird.

When a consumer walks into a dealership, they are treated and walked through a very comprehensive approach, Bird explained, adding that “it gets dealt with in a very personal way with the utmost respect.”

If someone asks for a price they are given a price. If they want to know the value of the vehicle they traded, they will get a fairly accurate value as a response.

But dealers need to present themselves online like they would in person at the dealership. And doing this may involve breaking some old habits.

If we look to the past, many dealers focused primarily on responding to a lead in hopes of generating some correspondence back and forth to build some rapport with the customer,

according to Glen Demetrio, President, CEO and founder of DMT Development Systems Group, a provider of lead generation and management software.

The quality of the response was secondary. And yet, as consumer needs continue to change and increasingly enter the digital arena, so too should lead management best practices.

Demetrio says he believes that, in the past dealers were not lazy so much as they were just not empowered “to have the tools to get the leads to them quickly so they could respond.”

“You know, sales people are on commission, they want to make money. They want to be able to provide awesome service to customers, so if you empower them they'll do it,” he says, adding that once they get that response done and it's being done across the board, then the next step is to work on the quality of the reply. This includes things like grammatical issues and if the response answers the customer's needs.

Responding to digital leads quickly is important — crucial even, but ensuring that dealers also provide a high quality response and that they represent themselves online just as they would in person is also essential.

“They have to treat, follow-up, and train around the experience of that online interaction — like customers get when they have that physical interaction when walking into a dealership,” according to Bird.

For dealers to really capitalize on the growing number of consumers that engage digitally before entering the dealership, they will need to have the right tools, create a more consumer-oriented process, and modernize their best practices.

This way, they can take advantage of digital leads more effectively, efficiently and consistently over time.