

25 Cost-Effective Ways to Promote Your Dealership and Increase Sales

A Free Report

ROSSWORDS®

ADVERTISING, CONSULTING AND PUBLISHING

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Provided by
ROSSWORDS



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September, 2012

Introduction

Withn the last few years, new car dealerships have become aware of the seismic changes afoot in the world of marketing and advertising. Some enterprising dealers have taken bold steps to explore and experiment with the latest online, digital and mobile platforms to achieve desired results. In the industry jargon, they are the trailblazers.

But for the vast majority of dealers, their approach to new technologies has been more studied and cautious. They understand the need to be visible and to engage their customers across multiple digital and mobile platforms, and yet they aren't prepared to forsake all forms of traditional advertising and marketing to achieve their goals. In other words, they are approaching digital marketing / social media slowly and (for the moment) keeping a foot in both camps.

Much of the hesitation about new media stems from the apparent complexity and the expense associated with these new ventures. By "new ventures," I'm referring to email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), optimized websites, social media, audio and visual streaming, live chat, text messaging, mobile applications, and more. Some of these methods *are* complicated, expensive and require a high degree of proficiency to implement.

But there are many creative ways to engage with audiences, online and offline, that don't have to be expensive or difficult. In *25 Cost-Effective Ways to Promote Your Dealership and Increase Sales*, I've compiled a list of simple, effective ideas that combine the best of digital and traditional marketing to help increase sales and boost profits.

If even a handful of these ideas are successfully adopted, your dealership can achieve reasonable sales and traffic goals. And the big secret about these ideas is no secret at all: Most are easy to implement and require only a modest investment of time.

So, what are you waiting for?

Get Social

Start a Facebook Fan Page and a YouTube channel. Establish a presence on Google+. These popular online platforms are free to join and can be leveraged to promote and showcase all aspects of your dealership. Surveys have revealed that 70% of car shoppers said they were influenced by social media sites. When used effectively, social networking is an effective tool for engaging your customers and for enhancing your brand.



Start a Pinterest Page

Pinterest is a fast-growing social networking site, and is the third most popular site behind Facebook and Twitter. The site is a free social bulletin board that allows users to “pin” and organize online images and follow other users’ images. In early 2012, it was reported that Pinterest users were mostly female, although that demographic is slowly changing.



Start a Blog

This is one of the best ways to increase your search engine ranking with Google, Yahoo! and Bing. Writing a blog takes time and dedication, but it’s also a proven way to establish yourself as an expert and gain credibility in your field. Since so few salespeople or managers write blogs, this represents a golden opportunity to establish your unique voice in this wide open space. Another key benefit to writing a blog is that it’s a great way to learn about the emerging trends, issues and innovations related to your industry. The process of researching and writing will help you to better understand your industry and give you a strong competitive advantage.



Send Press Releases to Local Media

Local newspapers, radio stations and TV networks are constantly looking for fresh content to fill their pages and airways. If you have a story to tell that’s not self-serving and has a legitimate news angle to it, then prepare a press release and send it to all the local media outlets. Make sure that it’s professionally written and submitted in the proper format. Develop contacts within the media so that you can be quoted in stories. Become the *de facto*



expert about the car industry. This is an easy way to gain exposure for your dealership, in any size market.

Build an Email List

If you haven't been collecting email addresses from customers in the last few years, you're missing the boat. Email lists can be used for any number of purposes, from sending e-newsletters to promoting special events. Lists can also be segmented so that certain promotions are sent only to select individuals based on age, income, location, purchasing patterns, and other demographics.



Variable Data Publishing

Most dealerships have access to some form of database that be utilized for direct-mail and other promotional efforts. With variable data publishing, technology exists to customize your mailing messages, thereby providing marketing pieces that are more personable. Copy and images can be tailored to each individual on your list. Your personalized messages can be used to drive sales and service business. There is a gold mine of data in that list just waiting to be tapped.

Follow up with your customers

A common complaint amongst those who buy cars from dealerships is that they never hear from their salesperson after the sale. If you are a salesperson, why not contact each customer three or six months after the purchase to see how they are enjoying their vehicle? Or send greetings on your customers' birthday and/or special occasions. If a customer feels that you have their best interests at heart, they will be predisposed to buy from you again in the future. Or recommend you to their friends. It's human nature.

Ask For Referrals

After customers have taken delivery of a new or pre-owned vehicle, contact them after a few months to see if they are happy with their purchase. While you're at it, ask for a referral. Do they know any friends or relatives who are in the market to buy a car? If your customer had a positive buying experience at your store, they should have no issue recommending you. You could even offer a referral (or bird dog) fee. Remember the old adage: *If you don't ask, you don't get.*



Participate in Cross Promotions.

Many local businesses (just like yours) are looking to attract new customers. By cross-promoting with other like-minded businesses, you can leverage your brand and appeal to new potential customers. For instance, if you produce a newsletter, and a local gym also produces one, why not write a series of articles in each other's newsletter? Don't forget to provide accreditation for your dealership and contact information at the end of each article. If you have an electronic bulletin board in your service department, you could include a 60-second advertisement for a popular local restaurant. In return, the restaurant could put a 60-second spot on their bulletin board for you. Or, with every new vehicle delivery, you could provide each customer with a coupon for a 10% discount at a local pet store, and the pet store could reciprocate by including a coupon for 10% off detailing services at your store.

Update your Website

Far too many dealership websites look like they were created in 1997. When customers visit your website, they are looking for accurate and reliable information. Your website doesn't have to feature all the bells and whistles – it just has to be relevant, functional and easy to navigate. High-speed Internet connectivity has made everyone hungry for information and impatient for results. If consumers can't find the information they're looking for in a hurry, or if they find a site too difficult to navigate, they won't return. You've effectively lost that potential customer's attention. An updated website makes it easy for customers to learn more about your products and services, and it makes it easy for them to purchase.



Post Printed Materials on Your Website

All printed, promotional materials (flyers, brochures, direct-mail pieces, postcards, newsletters) should be posted on your website, poste-haste. You may be involved in a promotion using traditional methods (ink on paper) and traditional channels (postal service, local newspaper, private distributor), but that doesn't mean you can't also leverage printed documents online. For instance, if you plan on distributing thousands of flyers to promote a neighbourhood sale, then post a PDF version of the flyer on your home page. Or, arrange to have the flyer pop open on your website during the week leading up to the sale. Adding promotional elements to your website is easy to do and it helps to spread the message.

Send Emails to Promote Sales and Service Specials

Whether you are hosting a private sale, a new car unveiling or a car care clinic, you need to spread your message using all of the available tools at your disposal, including email and e-newsletters. The research firm, Ipsos, recently polled people in 24 countries, and 85% said that they still use the Internet for email and 62% use it for social networking. Send the message to all those on your email list using a reliable email provider such as Constant Contact, MyAutoNews or Aweber. Salespeople should also utilize their private list of email addresses to promote sales and events.

Hand out copies of Sales Flyers and Brochures

When you create marketing materials such as flyers, brochures and direct-mail pieces, print additional copies to hand out at the dealership. Customers who visit your dealership may appreciate knowing about an upcoming promotion or event. Even items produced online (i.e., coupons, invitations) should be printed and handed out for the benefit of all. Leave these materials at reception, at the service counter, and in the customer waiting area, and discard them in recycling when the events are over.

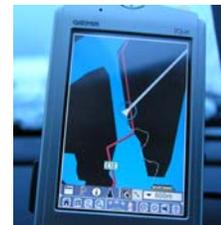
Presentation Is Important

The presentation of vehicles and merchandise tells prospective customers how much you care about your business. Customers expect to see vehicles that are clean and well positioned on the lot and in the showroom. They expect to see service and parts departments that are well-kept, well-lit and well-maintained. All staff members should be properly attired. First impressions last a lifetime. If customers are unimpressed with the cleanliness and orderliness of your facility, they will have doubts about other aspects of your business, too.



Provide Free Orientation Seminars

Most automobiles today come equipped with an array of sophisticated onboard electronics and digital devices. Provide a seminar for your customers to learn how to operate these new features. After the seminar, offer a Q&A session with your most tech-savvy staff members. You could even offer two seminars – one for your own customers, the other for the general public. Not many dealerships are currently offering orientation seminars about new technology, and so hosting such an event in your community would help you to stand above the pack. You could promote such



events on your web site, in company newsletters and in the automotive section of your local newspaper.

Be Consistent

Aristotle famously said *“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”* Once you have established standards of excellence for your dealership, don't let them slide. Success at the retail level requires constant vigilance and effort from all team members, day in, day out. Striving to meet – and exceed – your standards of excellence will increase your odds of achieving success.

Kijiji and Craigslist

These online classified websites are used by new car dealers to sell new and pre-owned vehicles. Although they aren't free, the cost of advertising on them is reasonable compared to traditional print and broadcast media. When advertising on Kijiji or Craigslist, the guidelines stipulate that dealerships ads must clearly identify themselves and their ads must be clean, comprehensive and prominent. Many dealers do a roaring business with pre-owned and demo vehicles by utilizing these classified sites.



Network, Network, Network

A recent survey conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Centre showed that the perceived difference between the top car brands and the challengers is shrinking. Competition in the auto industry has never been so stiff. That's why relationships are so important in maintaining market share and why your staff (especially in sales) should network as much as possible. Get involved in the community: join the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club and other civic associations. Pass out business cards whenever you attend local events.



Free Online Directory Sites

There are many online directories and review sites where new car dealers can list their businesses for free, including DealerRater, Yelp, Google Places, Yahoo! Local. Listing your business on these sites will help to increase your visibility online. Nielsen recently conducted a study on behalf of Google which reported that the Internet influenced 50% of all car purchases. If you aren't on these online directories, you can bet that your competitors are.

Google places



List Your Dealership on Search Directories

Adding your business to online directories is one of the best ways to make your business visible to new prospects. It also helps with search engine ranking. When a prospective customer types your nameplate or business name into a search engine, your dealership should appear in the top results. Although there are dozens of free online directories to choose from, it's best to concentrate on the most popular sites, such as Google, Bing, Yahoo!, Yelp and Foursquare.

Copy. Steal

Steve Jobs once said that good artists copy, great artists steal. You should always be on the lookout for great ideas from other dealerships, from other retailers and other small to medium-size businesses. Don't be afraid to borrow an idea if it has worked elsewhere. It's not advisable to copy someone else's idea verbatim (i.e., stealing headlines, and body copy and images is a no-no), but it's perfectly okay to mimic an idea using your own words, images and strategies. If the idea is well thought out and well executed, there is a good chance it will succeed.

Be Classy, Respective and Clever

In all of your business dealings (public relations, marketing, relationships with peers and colleagues) avoid schlocky behaviour. Nothing turns a customer (or potential customer) off more than rude, disrespectful, dishonest and insincere behavior. Set high standards of conduct with your staff and make sure that everyone lives up to those standards at every point of contact, in the bricks and mortar world and online.

Brainstorm with your Staff

Your staff should always have their eyes peeled for great creative ideas. It could be an effective billboard or a unique direct-mail piece that grabs their attention. Ask them to collect the best ideas and be prepared to discuss them openly. You could even turn the exercise into a Contest: whosever ideas are chosen and acted upon wins a dinner for two, or free movie passes. Involving your staff in this way encourages teamwork and rapport, and it makes staff members feel appreciated for their efforts.



Performance Group Meetings

These meetings are true meetings of the minds among competitors within the same nameplate. New ideas are openly shared and discussed without fear that one dealer is going to steal customers from another (dealers are from different geographical areas). Often, dealer principals, managers and other attendees will bring samples of promotional items that worked at their stores and the group is encouraged to appropriate the best ideas and share best practices for their own businesses.

Cast a Wide Net

It never hurts to send promotional items to friends, neighbours, colleagues, suppliers, and even peers. It's polite to ask before you send, and if someone prefers not to receive such information, that's fine. If you publish a regular newsletter (printed or online), your friends and colleagues might even want to subscribe, especially if it contains lifestyle information, such as fitness tips, travel ideas, recipes, book and film reviews.

Send Thank You Letters

Saying 'thank you' in person or on the phone is great. Sending a thank you letter using snail mail is a far more personal and sincere gesture. It sends a message that you cared enough to buy a card and write a message in it. It tells customers that you appreciate their business, and they will remember it.





About ROSSWORDS

ROSSWORDS Advertising, Consulting and Publishing is a marketing and communications company based in Georgina, Ontario.

The company provides print and digital marketing solutions for the retail car industry, producing and distributing print-based and electronic newsletters, direct-mail packages, postcards, advertising flyers, brochures and business invitations.

ROSSWORDS has partnered with some of the industry's leading web developers and digital marketing experts to offer a full range of digital and social media packages. Those packages include automated e-newsletters and magazines, search engine optimization (SEO), social media management, web design and web maintenance, mobile marketing and text messaging services.

In addition to providing marketing solutions for new car dealerships, ROSSWORDS also provides editorial and content management services for the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association, the largest provincial automobile dealer association in Canada.

ROSSWORDS Advertising, Consulting and Publishing

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