



HARNESS THE POWER OF ONLINE REVIEWS

As online reviews play an increasingly important role in the automotive purchase process, reputation management becomes an essential tool for differentiating your dealership. Findings from several recent studies show just how influential online reviews can be:

- Online consumer reviews are now the second most trusted source of brand information, after recommendations from friends and family. The majority of consumers now think that online reviews are as reliable as a personal recommendation. Nearly seven of out 10 consumers will refer to online reviews before buying.
- More than two-thirds of car shoppers said that reading dealership reviews influenced which dealership they visited when shopping for a vehicle. Location and price seem to be declining as decision-making factors relative to good online reviews.
- The total number of reviews posted for a specific business affects its overall reputation. A large number of reviews increases the credibility of the rating.

It is clear that online reviews are affecting decisions about where customers will shop and what they will buy. If your dealership does not have a strong positive presence on online review sites, your prospects may be going elsewhere (it goes without saying that negative reviews can have a damaging effect on sales, and need to be addressed). So, how do you encourage positive reviews for your dealership?

Here are a few best practices that can help:

- **Create a culture** within your store that emphasizes good customer service to encourage positive reviews. Turn your customers into raving fans.
- **Ask for reviews.** Build a time for soliciting reviews into the sales process. Have sales consultants talk to customers about writing a review while they are still at the dealership. Most customers are willing to do this when asked directly, but might not take the time without being prompted. Reward sales consultants who actively support and request customer reviews.
- **Make it easy** for customers to write and post reviews by sending them links via iPads while they are waiting for F&I or delivery, when they are still excited about the new vehicle. An iPad selling system that provides links directly to the most popular review sites, such as Google, DealerRater and Yelp, provides quick access, and can avoid IP conflict issues.
- **Monitor** what people are saying and respond to *all* reviews. Thank customers who provide positive feedback and address negative concerns politely to let customers know that their feedback is heard and valued, then quickly handle any issues off-line.

Bob Euper, assistant marketing/customer relations manager of Lou Fusz Toyota, said, "We post our unfiltered online reviews from Yelp and DealerRater right on our store's Website because we know our prospects are going to check us out before they come in. We have a top-down commitment to customer satisfaction, and you can see that in reviews we get. It's incredibly persuasive for prospects to read such positive feedback directly from our customers, so we use iPads in the store to make it easy."

Jim Hughes, co-founder of IntellaCar, the iPad selling system used by Lou Fusz Toyota, added, "Online reviews make every dealer's reputation visible to the public. They can be a powerful tool and build your credibility, so ease of access makes a difference."

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