

AUTOMOTIVE DIGITAL MERCHANDISING BEST PRACTICES

A guide to driving greater online shopper engagement



HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR ONLINE SHOWROOM

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INTRODUCTION

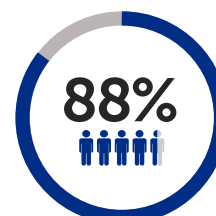
The online showroom is your most powerful selling tool

The number of dealerships customers visit during their car shopping journey has dropped from an average of **5.4 in 2012** to **1.5 in 2018**. That means most consumers buy a car at the very first dealership they walk into, as they have already done the vast majority of their research and shopping online. Since dealer websites see an average of 20x more traffic than the physical showroom, providing the best possible online experience is the key to turning shoppers into buyers.

According to Autotrader and Kelly Blue Book, **88%** of car shoppers use the internet as a primary research tool in their shopping journey. That means vehicle detail pages (VDPs), where consumers spend the majority of their time on your website, are critical to engaging and converting shoppers.

When a shopper lands on your VDP, it's your first and perhaps only chance to earn their trust. Your VDPs need to show shoppers everything they want in a compelling, easily digestible format. Use these proven merchandising best practices to ensure that you're getting the highest return from your online showroom.

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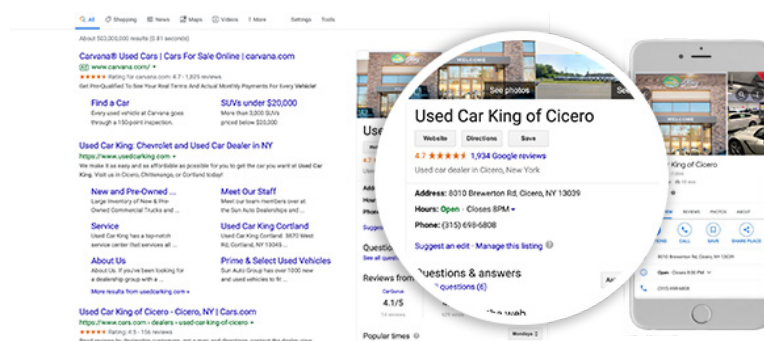
Car shoppers who research vehicles online



HELP SHOPPERS FIND YOU

Optimize your online listings

Create a Google My Business page. This is one of the most powerful tools in your digital marketing arsenal. Your Google My Business listing is free, boosts your online presence, and makes your business visible in local searches. Start by Googling your business to see if you already have a listing. If you do, claim it and edit the information. If you don't, create a new page and enter your dealership's business information. Add your service area information, including all zip codes and/or cities you serve. After you've made sure all your details are correct, submit the information and verify the listing. Adding additional pages or listings on Yelp and Facebook will further strengthen your online visibility.



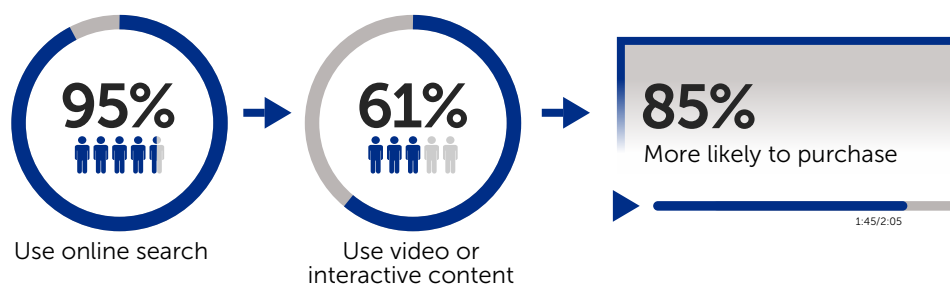
Your VDPs impact online search results as well

Whenever applicable, include keywords or phrases in your vehicle descriptions such as: one previous owner, clean Carfax or Autocheck, pet-free, smoke-free, garage-kept, navigation, etc. You should also highlight unique, valuable vehicle features with friendly, easy-to-understand language that avoids technical jargon and complicated acronyms. Adding these terms significantly increases customer engagement and appeal while enabling you to rank higher in consumer search results.



MAKE IT INTERACTIVE

According to recent findings by Google, **95%** of online shoppers use search, with **61%** of them accessing videos or interactive content in the process. Other research shows that consumers who watch product videos or engage with interactive content are as much as **85%** more likely to purchase.



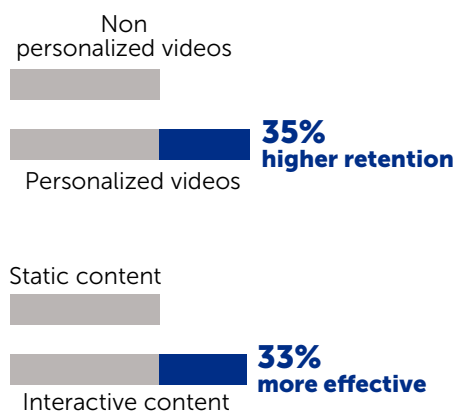
So what should you do? Add videos and interactive merchandising tools to replicate the physical showroom experience. Your website is the new storefront with today's consumer. If you're not helping them fall in love with your vehicles online, you'll never see them on your lot.

Personalization works

Consumers have grown accustomed to personalized experiences from their news feeds, social networks, and shopping apps, where content is tailored to their unique needs and behavioral history. For example, Amazon personalizes its home page for each user based on that user's previous searches, views and purchases. Consumers also value the ability to control their immersive experiences. Videos and interactive content drive higher engagement by enabling them to do just that.



The average retention rate of personalized videos is **35%** higher than non-personalized videos (Vidyard, 2017), and interactive content is **33%** more effective at educating buyers than static content (Inc.com). To truly differentiate your website experience, consider immersive 360 vehicle walkarounds that put consumers in the driver's seat and allow them to fully explore your vehicles. This will translate into much higher VDP engagement - which means more buyers for your dealership.



Photos matter too

Apart from video and interactive experiences, providing a large number of high quality vehicle-specific images is the most effective method for engaging shoppers. A 2018 Power of Pictures study by Cox Automotive reported that **40%** of consumers would be willing to buy a vehicle without ever seeing it in person based on the images they viewed online. The bottom line? Photos make a difference. Close-up photos and images of unique details and value-added features increase shopper trust and build confidence.

40%
of consumers would buy a vehicle based only on photos





TELL A UNIQUE STORY

Move the buying decision beyond price by showcasing unique vehicle features

According to Google, search queries for specific vehicle features like back-up camera and panoramic sunroof have grown by more than **40%** in the past few years. By 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator². That's why leading auto dealers are using interactive technology to showcase unique vehicle features directly from their VDPs. The more you can dimensionalize each car's specific value and story, tailored to individual shopper preferences, the greater your likelihood to convert online shoppers into buyers.

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Pay attention to vehicle summaries

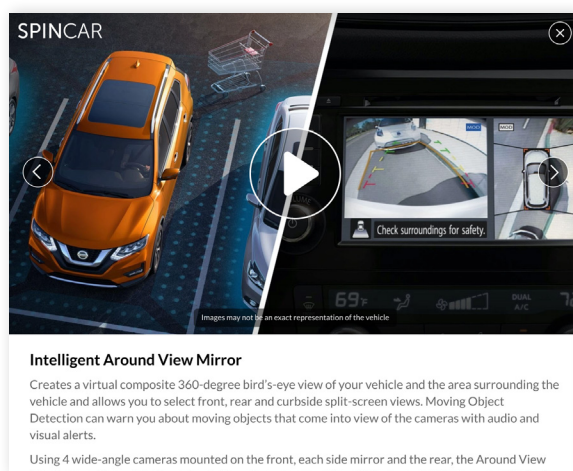
A great vehicle summary helps consumers understand the true value of a vehicle by highlighting its most unique features. Focus on the most valuable features and avoid technical jargon or obscure acronyms. Omit common things that consumers already expect in a vehicle or are relatively standard, like power locks and windows. Instead, include high-priority features that distinguish a vehicle, highlight its value and are most appealing to consumers – like panoramic sunroofs or adaptive cruise control. Doing this will not only justify your price, but also encourage buying decisions based on a vehicle's unique merits and overall value.



Be mindful of vehicle descriptions

Once you've captured the shopper's attention with a strong vehicle summary, you can introduce the rest of the features and vehicle specs. Unfortunately, most vehicle descriptions suffer from too much or too little information. By stuffing too much in, consumers are left feeling confused with acronyms, technical terms, and a lengthy list of basics like heat, A/C, and AM/FM radio. Too little, and consumers may bounce off your page to learn more from Google or a competitor's site.

Your vehicle descriptions should engage, inform, connect, and most importantly, tell a unique value story. By doing this, you'll be able to instill greater confidence in your shopper's decision-making process.



**ENGAGE
INFORM
CONNECT**



GET THEM TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Provide clear and accurate price information

Affordability is a key consideration for every shopper. The “can I afford it?” moment in a car shopper’s journey is critical. Google search queries that are price and vehicle specific (for example, “cars for sale under \$20,000” and variations like “[brand] cars for sale under \$20,000”) have seen a significant rise in search volume in the last few years.

Once a consumer decides on the type of vehicle that interests them, finding that a vehicle is out of their price range can send them back to square one. So, when a shopper lands on your VDP, price should be clearly visible above the fold and have a consistent placement across all VDPs to enable easy comparisons as they move through multiple pages and models.

If the vehicle price isn’t readily visible, many shoppers assume it’s out of their price range - or worse, feel a sense of distrust with the dealership.

Offer a variety of CTAs

Calls to action, or CTAs, are critical for moving shoppers down the purchase funnel. CTAs such as initiating a live chat, scheduling a test drive, texting a sales advisor, or signing up for price alerts encourage shoppers to engage with the dealership. Simple lead forms are also a strong tool for encouraging shoppers to take the next step in the decision-making journey. Shorter forms have higher conversion rates, which means more leads. Longer ones may allow the dealership to capture more information, but they create greater levels of friction which leads to higher website bounce rates. Include dealership phone numbers and emails on your forms to provide shoppers with additional contact options.



IMPROVE YOUR REPUTATION (AND VISIBILITY)

Solicit customer reviews

Online reviews have a direct impact on whether customers can easily find you, so ask satisfied customers to leave reviews on 3rd party sites to drive search results and boost your online reputation. Some recommended sites include DealerRater, Cars.com, Yelp, and Google Reviews. These reviews instill trust and confidence that buying from your dealership is a good decision, and gathering them is easy. Beyond your employees asking satisfied consumers to leave reviews, there are a number of 3rd party providers who can automate the solicitation and publishing processes.



Your dealership's primary entrance is now online, so it's essential that you bring the physical showroom experience to your website. Effective digital merchandising can enable your dealership to drive greater shopper engagement while differentiating your vehicle inventory. Implementing these best practices will transform your shopper experience and encourage more prospective buyers to engage with and choose your dealership.

¹ Car Buyer Journey, Cox Automotive, 2016

² Frost & Sullivan and Gartner, 2018

