



You've built a great Web site. You're getting a steady flow of leads from Internet aggregators. What else can you do to drive sales performance? The answer is simple: send out an e-newsletter.

Emerging as the third major tool for driving dealer sales, e-newsletters now join Web sites and Internet aggregator leads as one of the most effective ways to uncover hot prospects and ultimately bring ready-to-close buyers into your dealership. E-newsletters are particularly effective because they drive sales activities through multiple channels — scheduled test drives, Web site, call center and service visits — helping you turn leads into sales and sales into lifetime customers.

Unlike traditional e-mail promotions, e-newsletters engage customers and prospects for the long haul. Combining lifestyle content and professionally written industry articles with a progressive call to action, e-newsletters provide an easy way to stay in touch with prospective buyers and continually expose them to your brand. Results-driven e-newsletters grab subscribers' attention, leverage pull-marketing techniques that bring prospects to your virtual door and provide valuable analytics that enable you to focus your sales efforts on those who are genuinely ready to buy.

If you think an e-newsletter is too much of an undertaking, think again. A fully managed e-newsletter service will do all the work for you — from writing and design to sends and reporting. All you do is supply the e-mail addresses. Best of all, e-newsletters boast low, single-digit opt-out rates and high continuous open rates, often exceeding 20 percent, making them the ideal marketing platform.

What makes e-newsletters such an effective sales tool for dealers? Their impact is immediate and generally continues for weeks after each send. "Schedule My Test Drive" and other call-to-action buttons generate sales activity almost immediately. When the subscriber clicks the button, your e-newsletter service automatically sends an e-mail to your ISM or BDC, and creates an opportunity in your CRM system. This way, your sales team is able to follow up and

schedule solid appointments, often within just a few hours.

Scott Haynes, Internet marketing manager at Penske Indianapolis, can testify to the effect of e-newsletters on lead generation. "Within the first hour of the newsletter going out, I had 15 test drives," Haynes said. "My lead rate probably goes up 50 percent in the two to three days after (customers) read the newsletter."

Subscribers typically request test drives in response to e-newsletter content — often vehicle reviews, customer testimonials or special promotions — that sparked their interest. They'd been thinking about buying a vehicle and now they've read something that convinces them to take the next step. As a result, dealers find prospects who respond to e-newsletter calls-to-action are far more likely to actually show up for their appointments. And from an ROI perspective, if a dealer closes just 50 percent of e-newsletter test drive leads in a given month, the service will usually pay for itself.

Since the Internet transformed the way people buy vehicles, most dealers have made significant investments in their Web sites to provide easy access to information, reinforce their brand and accelerate the sales cycle. E-newsletters provide a proven way to drive traffic to your Web site, often doubling traffic for the first week or two after each send. Links in e-newsletter promotions and vehicle reviews can bring subscribers directly to your Web site inventory page, drawing existing customers, be-back leads and other prospects you might not otherwise reach. Experience has shown that once a subscriber clicks through to your inventory page, he represents a solid opportunity worthy of follow-up by your sales team.

"At first I was skeptical," said Matt Lamoureux, director of Internet Business Development for Acton Toyota and Scion. "Then we sent our first e-newsletter and I was impressed to see our Web site traffic spike to 2.5 times its normal rate. Then, over the next month, the e-newsletter delivered even more tangible results as we received several qualified buy signals and test drive requests. Today, I am a believer!"

Although the Internet plays an ever-increasing

role in the vehicle purchase process, dealers still do a lot of business over the phone. E-newsletters can have a dramatic effect on call-center activity by inciting readers to call in response to specific promotions, vehicle reviews or other content. In general, inbound call volume continues to climb over the course of the month following an e-newsletter send, a measure that can be easily tracked by using a dedicated 800 number or phone extension in your call center.

Via a call tracking number provided at the top of the e-mail, more than 90 customers called Penske's dealerships to schedule sales and service appointments or to ask questions in the first month. "I am still getting phone calls from the e-newsletter that went out three weeks ago," Haynes said.

Taking things one step further, premier e-newsletter services can provide real-time analytics indicating which subscribers read each article, what links they clicked and how long they spent reading. This detailed information can help you identify high-consideration leads — readers who have engaged in a significant way with the newsletter content — and follow up with targeted promotions that match their interests. For example, you could pinpoint all subscribers who read an article on the new SUV that just hit your lot and send them an e-mail describing the special lease rates you're offering on that vehicle.

When it comes to outselling and outmaneuvering competing dealerships, e-newsletters can give you the edge you're looking for. You'll build your brand through monthly communications and forge lasting relationships that turn buyers into lifetime customers. You'll drive sales activity through multiple established sales channels — test drives, Web site and call center — generating better leads and focusing your sales efforts for higher close rates. So if you want to take sales to the next level, it's time to add e-newsletters to your Internet marketing mix.

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