



Social Media & The Dealership

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The Dealer.com Thought Leadership Series provides dealers with timely, helpful strategies that help dealers capitalize on today's most exciting and lucrative digital marketing opportunities. Best Practices for Social Media and the Dealership looks at some practical steps you can take to use social media as a retention agent for your most influential customers, and maps out some bad habits to avoid out there on the social web.

Social media has evolved into a must-have in your dealership's marketing ecosystem. We hope that these best practices will help you utilize social media more effectively. If you have any questions about this document, or about our industry leading social media and digital marketing solutions, contact us today.

Do: Provide Relevant, Engaging Content

At Dealer.com, we always tell our customers that content is king. After all, your customers can already go to your website for inventory and specials. To achieve a competitive advantage make your social properties a more interesting place to be—a place that fans and customers new and old—want to visit.

Action Step: Research three community events that align with your brand—1) a brand enthusiast owner group, 2) a local charity, and 3) a festival in your region. Become an information source for each of these events by generating awareness via your social channels. Better yet, host a gathering of brand enthusiasts, sponsor the charity event, or give away tickets to the festival. Promote these on your social properties and cross-promote on the social properties of each.

Do: Learn to Listen

To carry on a conversation, you need to be a good listener. The same applies to social interactions online. You can be sure that there are both positive and negative reviews online about your dealership. Listen to what both are saying and create and implement a response strategy.

Good Reviews: Good reviews about your dealership tell you what you do best as a company. By studying the experiences at your dealership that wow customers, you can replicate those behaviors across each of your profit centers.

Bad Reviews: Don't panic if you see a few bad reviews, but if you start to see a pattern, you have some process improvements

to make at your dealership. One voice in the crowd can be cast aside as simply an ornery customer, however echo after echo of the same type of complaint means your dealership is doing something wrong.

Action Step: Keep an ear to the ground about your reputation. Scour the major review sites for mentions of your dealership. Respond to as many reviews as you can, both positive and negative.

Do: Create a Response Strategy

A social media strategy includes selecting a representative at your dealership who is best suited to listen, talk, and connect with your customers and can represent your brand. Limit those who have Admin access to post comments to just a few trusted individuals to keep the message consistent.

Action Step: Designate authorized responders at your dealership, and develop a response matrix for them to follow. A response matrix helps you analyze the type of response that is best for certain situations. If, for example, you receive a complaint on dealerrater.com, a response matrix will help you decode the type of complaint and determine the most measured, smartest response.

Develop your Response Matrix first by assessing each posting online, carefully evaluating its tone, accuracy and purpose, and then responding thoughtfully and professionally.

Do: Identify Your Influencers

Your service customers are the ones who come in most often. Enlist your most enthusiastic service (and sales) customers to be advocates for you on the web. After all, it's free marketing from folks who will have more success encouraging friends to visit your service department or showroom.

Action Step: Encourage your service staff to hand out business cards, or to send follow up emails that contain links to popular review sites like, Yelp, DealerRater, and Google. Track the progress of your reviews online each month, and reward your service or sales staff for their efforts. Set benchmarks for each department to solicit a certain number of reviews, and attach a \$50 or \$100 bonus each month when they surpass it.

SOCIAL DOs

Do: Take Upset Customers Offline

We encourage you to address all reviews in a calm and respectful manner in the public arena, but sometimes you will not be able to satisfy the unhappiest of customers. In these cases, it's best to move the conversation offline. Offer the dissatisfied party your direct line and deal with it one-on-one.

Action Step: To quell the dissatisfied customer, customize this sample communication. "Hello (Name), I understand and sincerely apologize for your frustration, but the best way to get this resolved is to work with me directly. Please give me a call when you can, (Phone Number).

Do: Keep it Classy

You know what they say, garbage in, garbage out. Today's technology makes it easy to use hand-held video equipment. Even your iPad, iPhone and smart phone have acceptable photo and video capabilities.

If you're shooting a testimonial, employee bio, or an event at your dealership, don't post it unless you can create a quality recording. Think of lighting, background noise at the dealership, traffic outside, and produce your videos cleanly before posting. For photos, post clear and bright images to make so it is more eye-pleasing to the viewer.

Action Step: Test, test, test and test again. Execute a dry run of the video to determine the most acceptable lighting, sound and backdrop. Play it back for your colleagues, and poll them on the quality on a scale of 1 to 5. Keep at it until you have a solid production. Oh, and if you're posting it on Facebook, don't forget to tag the subjects of your video so it appears on their Facebook wall!

Do: Be On Time

Timeliness is critical to good customer service, whether you are responding to a simple question or diffusing an angry customer. You don't want to leave an angry FB post or tweet without a response for too long as it will appear that you're not listening or don't care.

Action Step: At the very least, setup Google Alert for your dealership to assist in the monitoring of your dealership name in reviews, or ask your digital marketing provider if they recommend a more comprehensive reputation monitoring tool.

Do: Track Everything

Calculating the ROI of your social media is important to determine what is and isn't working. To ensure maximum impact for your Social Media Marketing strategy, measure everything; followers, fans, tweets, retweets, comments, reviews, mentions, ratings, all of it. Determine based on your analytics what is most effective.

Action Step: Invest time into studying your metrics and apply the business intelligence to future decisions about where and how to focus future social media campaigns. If you are having trouble making sense of the numbers, ask your website vendor or account manager for help.



SOCIAL DON'Ts

Don't Focus on Sales: Remember the goal of social is to build relationships, not to play salesman. There are plenty of opportunities to showcase your inventory—keep it separate from your daily interactions with social fans, or you'll end up being “that guy.” Your social content should be driven by the topics that interest you and your social relationships. Posting car talk, giveaways, community events, testimonial videos, ownership best practices and service specials are all ways to engage with consumers online.

Avoid Sensitive, Polarizing Topics: Political and social issues are often hot topics, but taking sides on your social sites is likely to result in lost customers. Stay neutral, in fact, avoid controversial discussions and touchy subjects on your dealership's social sites altogether.

Ditch the Autoresponder: Personalize thank you messages to each new Facebook Fan, blog reader or Twitter Follower, but beware of autoresponder emails. Consider it your first opportunity to impress future customers with that personal touch. A personalized thank you will start this relationship on a positive note.

Just Say No to Auto-repost/ReTweet: Look before you leap, and certainly look before you send others leaping. Reposting or retweeting relevant content is a best practice, but don't just trust the headline. Follow the path yourself and ensure the quality of the post or tweet. You don't want to send your friends down a dead-end street.

Avoid Message Bombardment: Social media is not a game of who can gain the largest audience; it's a game of who can capture and keep their followers' attention so they'll remain or become new customers. With compelling content and strategic promotions, you can steadily increase your social media base and increase top-of-mind-awareness of your brand.

Never, Ever Fight Back Online: Doing so can destroy your reputation. Take all flagrant exchanges offline to avoid tarnishing your brand.

Be Neat: Although you are extremely busy, take care to craft blog posts, tweets and posts that contain zero typographical errors. In addition to spell check, ask someone at your dealership to carefully proofread your work before it goes out to the world.

Don't Take Social Media for Granted: Opting not to use social media is not an option. Your success using social media is only going to be as good as the thought and strategy you put in it. When planning your strategy, remember to keep these goals in mind:

- You need social media to increase awareness of your dealership online where your customers are.
- You need to understand what is being said about you online.
- You need to engage with customers, not just with your inventory but with content that interests consumers in your market area and pulls them toward your brand.
- You need customers to post reviews online to elevate your search rankings and to give consumers an idea of what shopping at your dealership will be like. (There are no better advocates than happy customers!)
- You need to track the success of your social media properties to better understand the needs of your customer base.

