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THE MOTOR DEALER REPORT FROM AUSWILD & CO
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Six Tips on Capturing & Converting Sales Leads

Dealers face many challenges in today's volatile and competitive automotive market. No longer are the hurdles to success created by competitors alone or even by changing economic factors.

Dealers now must also contend with digitization, which inarguably has had an impact on the sales cycle. Digitization enables consumers to search for what they want on the go and makes it easier for them to narrow the field more quickly.

However, in some ways, going digital has made the sales cycle longer and more complex because of the vast amount of information that is available online, and because of the number of consumer-facing apps and websites that claim to make it easier (and less expensive) for the buyer to find the perfect car.

Never before has lead capturing and nurturing been so critical for dealers, large or small, new or well-established.

According to a ***Dun & Bradstreet*** lead-generation survey, it "takes a village" to convert a lead into a sale. And today, the approach a dealer takes to lead management – an important early step in the sales process – will determine whether that village will even have the opportunity to convert.

CRM software company, ***Salesforce.com***, says as many as six to eight touchpoints will take place before a viable sales lead is even created.

Dealers need to face head-on the challenges that accompany lead management and a longer sales cycle.

According to *Troy Smith*, the president and founder of ***Search Optics***, a digital marketing company, one of these challenges is often a lack of resources. Many dealers don't have the time, money and personnel to manage this important function efficiently or effectively in-house.

In such cases, finding the right partner is often the difficult part. *Smith* says that dealers should take the time to request customer references and verify how and if the partner successfully met lead and sales objectives.

Good, consistent lead-management processes can improve the car shopping experience, connecting customers with experienced personnel to answer any questions they may have about one of the biggest purchases they'll make.

Whether this important function is outsourced or performed in-house, there are best practices that should be adopted.

Here are *Smith's* six tips to keep in mind:

- Make sure leads are automatically populated into a tracking system so follow-up is recorded and no lead is lost simply because it wasn't recorded.

- Build a prospect database and regularly maintain it with up-to-date lead information to drive future marketing efforts.

- Staff your team with professionals who have experience in auto sales, and provide extensive training to ensure potential customers receive the highest level of service.

- Prioritise lead follow-up for faster, more personalized service. Make sure leads are responded to within minutes by a knowledgeable professional. Provide consistent, friendly and regular follow-up on each lead.

- Ensure the lead-management program meets all OEM communication requirements and works within existing business development processes. It should be integrated with internal CRM systems, datasets and workflows.

- No matter how experienced the lead-management partner might be, dealers should have a say in the overall approach taken. They know what will work best for their target market. They should have access to data and receive regular reporting.

Following lead management best practices – and committing the entire dealership to them – will dramatically affect the lead-to-deal conversion rate.

***Troy Smith** is president and founder of **Search Optics**, an online strategy and digital marketing company specialising in solutions for automotive dealerships. This article was first published in **Wards Auto**.*

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