

Are Your Salespeople a Search Engine?

By Dwayne Wiggins

As we rocket into the future, we can be sure of two things in our ever changing market:

1. The Internet and technology will steadily influence our customers' shopping habits
2. A next generation of customers will eventually take over the market

If we do not plan and embrace these two inevitable facts, then we will eventually become obsolete and business will pass us by. Many of you may have already seen this in your dealerships and how it is affecting your sales teams. The good news is that we are still in a people business and, if we can effectively understand these new customers and their shopping habits, we can continue to achieve a high level of success in the dealership. So, who is this next generation of customers and how do they buy?

They are known as the millennials and were born between 1980-2000. In 2013, millennials accounted for approximately 23% of vehicle sales, which increased to 28% in 2014. This generation has grown up with technology—they use the Internet instead of encyclopedias, they prefer to text or e-mail instead of having face-to-face conversations, and they have smartphones instead of land lines. Furthermore, with endless information at their fingertips, they are becoming some of the most highly educated consumers in the market.

How do they shop? Online! On average, millennials will spend 13 hours researching vehicles and dealerships before visiting one to two dealerships in person. To further put things in perspective, below are some statistics stats for you to consider:

- 40,000 Internet search queries every second
- 3.5 Billion searches per day

- 1.2 Trillion searches per year, worldwide
- 67% of search queries are done worldwide
- 81% of search queries are done in the United States

With these facts and statistics, it makes sense that millennial customers often utilize salespeople as an information search engines. Upon the initial greeting, millennials want to know every bit of information about the vehicle. They have a list of questions for salespeople to answer from the online research conducted prior to visiting the dealership. However, they tend to not like being asked a lot of questions. Fast is never fast enough for them! Millennials want to finalize the deal as soon as possible and may become non-committal if the process is drawn out. Is your sales team a search engine? If you are unsure, answer the questions below and evaluate how they apply to your sales team:

- Does your sales team only give the customer information that he/she has requested?
- Do your salespeople tend to only process information that is supplied to them?
- Do your salespeople sometime give too much information and confuses the customer?
- Do your salespeople sometime provide inaccurate or inappropriate information?
- Does your sales team provide information at the wrong times?

The truth is ALL salespeople are living, breathing search engines in your store. So, the question to ask is, "Are they well-informed and trained search engines?" If any of the above questions were true for your team, here is an easy solution to help you optimize all of your search engines.



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Step One – Identify what attracts people to search engines and train your salespeople to emulate that. For example, some of the features that people prefer in search engines include:

- Informative
- Knowledge of inventory
- High product knowledge
- Quick and efficient
- Anticipates wants and needs (auto fills search words/phrases for you)
- Gives options to broaden, or narrow, a search
- Finds solutions (will correct any mistyped words for you)
- Consistency – Everyone receives the same information/treatment
- Not pushy
- Polished and customer-friendly
- Transparent – No hidden agenda

Step Two – Do not lose sight of the fact that, although customers are evolving, the decision to purchase is still the same as it always has been. The decision still comes down to price versus value. How do we know that? We have all tried several strategies to raise our effectiveness in this market and make it easier for consumers to buy.

For example, dealerships have revamped their websites to appeal to millennials, and have partnered with third party pricing/buying sources (i.e., True Car, Trade-in Marketplace, Edmunds) to provide online trade-in values. Furthermore, dealerships have changed and redefined their pricing strategies to meet the demands of this growing customer base – list price, one price, don't price, or employee pricing for everyone. Dealerships have also tried various methods of delivering their new price strategies – marketing pieces on the car, via e-mail, over phone, via text, or through various social media outlets. In the end, price will not matter if the customer does not see any value.

Step Three – Surrender to success and realize that the day of hiring new people and training them with videos and the “Go Get ‘Em Tiger” Method is over. It may seem that millennials want to avoid the selling situation, but really

they want to avoid the bad selling situation. They do not like the hard sell or dealing with pushy salespeople. Therefore, dealerships should focus on training their search engines to be very well educated about the products, be concise and to the point, and move consumers through the sales process as fast as possible. Millennials are learning something new about buying cars every day, so make sure that your sales team is learning something new on how to sell to them every day!

