

Second Dealer Marketing article

Subject: Marketing Solutions

Title: The Whole Vehicle and Nothing But

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Proverbs can be old, your inventory can't. One of my favorite proverbs is, "He that will not look forward must look behind."

More than ever, dealers are looking forward, as shown by the number of dealerships that now have Web sites. According to a recent NADA survey, 94% of dealerships utilize the Internet, up from 74% only five years ago.

Yet as forward-looking as these dealerships might be, they most likely still lag behind today's consumer. Thanks to the Internet, today's automotive customer has access to unlimited information, shops from the comfort of home and enjoys a greater number of vehicle choices. Unfortunately, these same new-wave consumers are not as brand loyal, making it more difficult for dealers to move their inventory.

Here are three proverbs to think about when promoting your inventory:

"You can't see the whole sky through a bamboo tube"

Tell More, Not Less. Unlike traditional customers, your Internet customers expect immediate access to full and objective information. Don't hold back. Earn their trust and give them full vehicle descriptions and pricing, including standards, technical specs, options, exterior-interior vehicle views and warranty information. Above all, make sure your customers and your sales agents have access to the same vehicle details. This doesn't mean you have to make it easy on your competition. You should decide which vehicles can be searched on your site, as well as how those vehicles are described or compared. The best vehicle descriptions give shoppers more reasons to buy your product.

"Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped."

Manage Risk. Perhaps more than most businesses, dealerships are constantly under the watchful eyes of state and federal regulators. Dealers can be sued for just about anything—and have been. A dealership can be required to pay thousands of dollars for failure to disclose facts or for making unsupported claims about a particular vehicle. Under such conditions, managing risk is not just a solid business practice, it can often mean the difference between keeping your doors open and shutting them for good. Yes, we're a litigation-happy country. But consistent, complete and accurate vehicle descriptions and prices, posted for all to see, greatly reduce your chances of being sued.

“Nobody has ever bet enough on a winning horse.”

Promote Everywhere and Often. With close to 70% of car shoppers doing their research over the Internet, visiting at least five different sites, odds are your prospects know more about their vehicle choices than even your own sales force. So, go with the flow. Post your inventory on your own site, as well as on car buying sites, such as cars.com, NADAguides, Autobytel, and AutoTrader. When you do, make sure you give buyers and sellers the information they need to see your vehicles in the best light. And don't forget to keep your inventory data current. Stale horses don't win many races.

Diminished brand loyalty. Higher volumes of new vehicles. And inflated inventories. Under such conditions, how can you sell more products? One way is to ***let accurate vehicle descriptions be your guide.*** Sounds like a new proverb to me.

Chrome Systems provides vehicle data, software and systems to the auto retail channel.