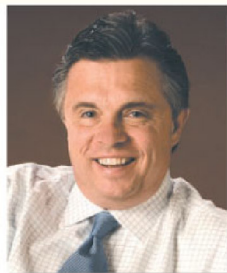


Internet Marketing



David Thomas

Several months ago, my dealership's Internet director, Chris Hanson, said to me, "There is not enough gross profit in a car deal to buy trust." Here is what led up to his comment and, more importantly, some changes we made to stop trying to buy trust and start earning it.

The Internet has given consumers unprecedented access to information, but the fact remains that the knee-jerk reaction of most consumers is to mistrust auto dealers. Given this lack of trust, they hide from car dealers until they just don't have any other choice. For the most part, however, if they want to buy a car, they still have to come into a dealership. So we asked ourselves:

What can be done to remove this friction in

the market, close the trust gap, get rid of the frustration, ultimately sell more cars, and make more money?

The first step was to realize that we had to show online consumers they could trust us, instead of trying to tell them. Okay, but how?

What we came up with was a shopping cart for vehicles on our Website. The shopping cart walks consumers through the buying process, online, without forcing them to come into the showroom. This is about earning trust by showing. The shopping cart shows consumers that they can trust us because it is the real deal; all of our cars have guaranteed actual selling prices, and the shopping-cart explains their credit to them, along with interest rates, rebates, trade in equity, warranties, protections, tax, title, fees, and accurate monthly payments.

Does it work? Does it remove friction in the marketplace and restore trust?

To answer those questions we asked our first shopping-cart customer about her experience. Here are her actual responses:

Would she have bought a car anyway? Yes

Did she shop other dealers? Yes

No Trust, No Sale

Did she consider taking what she learned in our shopping cart and going to a different store? No...She likes to buy, she just hates to be sold. The shopping cart let her decide.

What did she like the most? Being able to see the actual price, backed by the dealership's price guarantee. Color-matched photos and detailed vehicle features were important too.

Why didn't she engage with the other dealerships? She believed that she would have to endure high pressure sales tactics at other dealerships.

Most telling of all, when we asked if there was anything else that she would like to share, she said, "I have only been buying a car every 10 years because I dislike the process so much. Now that I understand how it works, my whole view of the car buying process has changed."

Folks, I've been selling cars for a long time and it doesn't get any better than when you hear that.

David Thomas is the dealer principal at Subaru of Dallas and Subaru of Plano. Prior to becoming a dealer, he was the number one Lexus salesperson from 1997-2000 and was famous for having sold a car a day for 3,000 days.

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