



apps

and
the

mobile web

Smartphones and mobile web are all the rage. Do you need to change your marketing strategy to dial in?

BY CHRISTY TAYLOR

Today all the cool kids are venturing into new ways of marketing vehicles, like using social media, online chats and even mobile applications and websites.

The popularity of “smartphones,” like the Blackberry, iPhone, Android and others, has been growing steadily over the past few years. A study conducted during October and November 2009 by Forrester Research (a technology and market research company) reports that 17% of all consumers surveyed have a smartphone. That number is up from 11% in 2008 and 7% in 2007. As phone carriers drop prices and expand features to capture market share, it’s a good bet the trend will continue.

One of the unique features of a smartphone is its ability to run mobile applications, software programs developed specifically for mobile phones. From tip calculators to wait times at Disney World there really is an app for everything. For car-buyers there are several mobile tools that can assist in the search providing vehicle history information, sales negotiation tips, trade-in valuations and more. In reality, before leaving their car to step onto your lot your customer could have searched your inventory, as well as your competitors, reviewed the CarFax on the car they want to buy and calculated their monthly payment. As the marketplace expands, there are also some apps available for dealers that can streamline productivity and make inventory comparison easier.

The other thing to consider when talking about cell phone trends, is the idea of mobile marketing. Chances are, if your customer is using an app to find your inventory from their phone then they will eventually land at your website. For that fact, you might want to consider the idea of a mobile webpage.

There are many phones capable of surfing the internet, but not all of them are created equal. While the iPhone can handle internet graphics and interfaces as well as a computer, viewing web pages on phones like the Blackberry can be more cumbersome. It is also difficult to view traditional webpages on “dumb phones,” the nickname given to web-enabled phones with QWERTY keyboards, which are owned by the majority of cell phone users. With a world wide web of knowledge literally at their fingertips customers will have access to your website, but without a mobile website they will not be able to view it.

Cars.com trainer Ralph Ebersole says there are clear internet traffic trends among customers using their phones to assist with car shopping. On the

DEALER APPS

VIN HUNTER PROFESSIONAL

This free app offers a suite of services to car dealers including CarFax integration and Black Book and NADA pricing info all from your phone. A CarFax account and subscription to Black Book and NADA are required for this app. Read more at www.vinhunterpro.com.

SLINGSHOT

Autoxloo's SlingShot allows dealers to upload a vehicle's stats, photos even video to their online inventory from their Windows Mobile phone from the auction, or anywhere, in less than five minutes. The SlingShot works by scanning the vehicle's VIN, taking a few pictures (and/or video if you are able), and navigating point-and-click menu that records the car's condition including mileage, specs and unique characteristics. See a product demo at www.autoxloo.com.



traditional cars.com website, the highest amount of activity happens on Mondays from 10am to 3pm. For cars.com's mobile site, recent numbers show Saturday's have the highest traffic rate with 10 million clicks a month. What does that mean? During the week customers are doing their research from their desktops and laptops, but when they are out shopping on Saturday and using their phones to guide the search.

The cost to build a mobile site is more affordable than you would think. Ebersole says the cost is minimal, compared to the construction of a traditional website, and is usually billed monthly. The site is optimized for internet-enabled mobile phones, including quickly-loading graphics and smaller screen sizes. In some cases, it also allows customers to call your toll-free number right from the mobile website.



CAR SHOPPING APPS

CARSALA

Entering a VIN and the price of the car on your lot puts Carsala to work doing price comparisons and availability assessments of nearby competitor's inventory for the customer. For an added fee, customers can ask to use a Carsala professional negotiator who will contact an average of 20 other dealers in your area to get a better price. For another fee, Carsala will have a mechanic inspect the vehicle. Check it out at www.carsla.com.

CAR BUYING HANDBOOK

Billed as "the app that the car dealers don't want you to know about" the Car Buying Handbook claims to put negotiating in the power of the customer's hands. Providing step-by-step advice on how to buy a car without getting swindled includes features like the in's and out's of talking down the sticker price and tips about buying F&I products.

CARTOPIA

Nationwide Insurance offers this free app that lets customers receive up to six free vehicle history scores (through Experian Automotive), review expected trade-in and retail pricing information, vehicle safety scores from the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety, vehicle specs and payment calculators. It also provides one-touch access to the network of Nationwide Insurance agents and Nationwide Banks for loans.

VEHICLE VIN SEARCH

A free app from CarFax, customers can enter a VIN number and run an instant "lemon check" on the vehicle for a green or red light of the car's record. If the mini-report shows a problem, the complete CarFax can be purchased for \$29.

INTERNET EXTRAS

TOYOTA TEMPORARILY SUSPENDS SALES OF SELECTED VEHICLES/RECALL

Eight models of the Toyota Motor Division are involved in the recall/sales suspension. Those models are listed below. There are reports of sticking accelerator pedal mechanisms.

Toyota's accelerator pedal recall and suspension of sales is confined to the following Toyota Division vehicles:

- 2009-2010 RAV4
- 2009-2010 Corolla
- 2009-2010 Matrix
- 2005-2010 Avalon
- Certain 2007-2010 Camry
- 2010 Highlander
- 2007-2010 Tundra
- 2008-2010 Sequoia

You cannot sell an UNSAFE vehicle without assuming liability!! Examine your own insurance policies, but I think you will find that in most cases you are not covered under this type of circumstance. You may even modify your purchase agreement referencing the recall with a separate document attached with full disclosure, however you are still selling a vehicle deemed unsafe by its manufacturer.

On the wholesale level, if you purchase one of the listed vehicles, be prepared to hold it in inventory until the solution has been identified and the problem corrected. The manufacturer, as of this afternoon, has not announced a date when a solution to the problem may be identified!

Check out the entire letter from NIADA's Mike Linn at www.fiada.com.

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