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Social strategies

Canadian auto dealer spoke with four social media gurus in the auto industry to learn more about their best practices. Here's what they had to say.

BY HEATHER HUDSON



Aleksandra Banas,
Digital Marketing Manager,
Lexus of Edmonton

Banas takes a common sense approach to her dealership's posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube.

"I'm a fairly active social girl and I think about what I would like to see [on social media] as a person and I implement that here [at the dealership]. It's not rocket science."

While Lexus of Edmonton has a presence on several platforms, with 1 billion active users, Facebook is where they focus. Banas posts once or twice a day, typically about hot new products, charity events, day-to-day activities in the dealership and holiday greetings.

"We can tell we're connecting with people by the comments and shares of our news, pictures and videos. They come in and say 'I saw this on your Facebook' and notice things like when we got a dog. Things happen every day— why not share it with your core group and even potential customers?"

Some of the dealership's videos have also garnered a lot of attention on YouTube. A product demonstration of the 2016 Lexus LS received half a million views.

Banas says most of their videos aren't quite that popular, but each of them helps connect the community with the dealership.

"Canadians love video. We do a lot of vehicle demonstrations and are getting more involved in playing around to see what works and what doesn't."



Glenn Pasch,
CEO, PCG
Digital
Marketing

Facebook is the "big horse" when it comes to social media— and if you're not using it right, you're missing out, says Pasch.

He recommends a minimum of one post per day that's fun, engaging and answers the question, "Why should I buy from you?"

Along with product demonstrations and photos of salespeople and happy customers, there should be

"We post delivery photos of guests receiving vehicles and they do fine, but anything unique always does really well. We once posted a Toyota Celica that looked like it was from the set of Mad Max and that got a lot of interest."

informational posts, such as "Three ways to service your car before temperatures rise."

"The goal should be for somebody to share [the post], not just look at it."

He noted that social media, particularly Facebook, is a prime place to advertise — and more dealers should be doing it. "It's really inexpensive right now and businesses are not all taking advantage of it." With Facebook analytics, targeted advertising to the right demographic is not only easy but also exceedingly effective.

He equates Facebook advertising prices to those of Google Adwords five years ago "before OEMs made it mandatory and drove up costs."

What does the future hold, according to Pasch?

More emphasis on mobile-ready content. A dealer case study his company ran found great success with, "Did you know our service department is open from 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m.? Click to call." Making it easy for customers to take action is critical;

More— and shorter— videos posted online. Keep videos around 15-20 seconds for maximum efficiency; and

More salespeople will brand themselves with video and other online content and leverage it across social media.



Josh Pogue, Digital Marketing Manager, Weins Canada

Social media is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

Pogue has learned that there are best practices— and then there are case-by-case approaches.

He points out that a Subaru customer is passionate about the brand and wants to be validated about its features on social media while Toyota or Honda customers are eager to learn about new products, design features and models. Like any aspect of business, it's a matter of knowing your customers, but social media should come with an element of fun.

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In addition to providing interesting content for customers, Pogue says Weins Canada has found success with Facebook's dark posts advertising platform.

“The targeting tools on Facebook are becoming pretty sophisticated. We can pull a list from our database and do a custom audience campaign and then build a lookalike campaign which says, ‘Of these 500 people, find 500 similar in terms of income, location, hobbies, etc. and let me market to them as conquests.’”

It's proven to be a powerful and cost-effective strategy. “On average, where we would be paying maybe \$1.80 for a Google display banner, we're paying maybe 50 to 60 cents [for a Facebook ad] right now. And our conversion rate is generally better than what we're getting with Google.”



Alexi Venneri, CEO, Digital Air Strike

Like any other part of business, social media requires a written policy to ensure it's handled consistently and strategically, says Venneri.

“Most dealers want their employees to engage on social channels but they need to be smart about what is allowed

“Things happen every day— why not share it with your core group and even potential customers?”

and set up processes for things like security of logins and passwords, response times for social media leads/ reviews and more.”

With a cohesive plan in place, dealers can make more productive use of social media, particularly in areas that can always use a boost, like fixed operations. Giving this business area play on social media can pay off in a big way.

Digital Air Strike's recent Automotive Social Media Trends Study indicates almost half of all service customers are influenced to stay with or change dealerships based on what they read online.

“Surveying service customers is one of the best ways to increase positive online reviews. Dealers should survey their sales and service customers every night and make it easy for happy customers to share their positive feedback publicly,” says Venneri.

Another best practice includes tweaking marketing budgets to allocate more to social advertising spending and get ahead of trends such as ridesharing, “lease sharing” between multiple people and the concept of vehicles for mobility only.

“With trends like this, social media will be even more crucial as consumers will rate their experiences.”