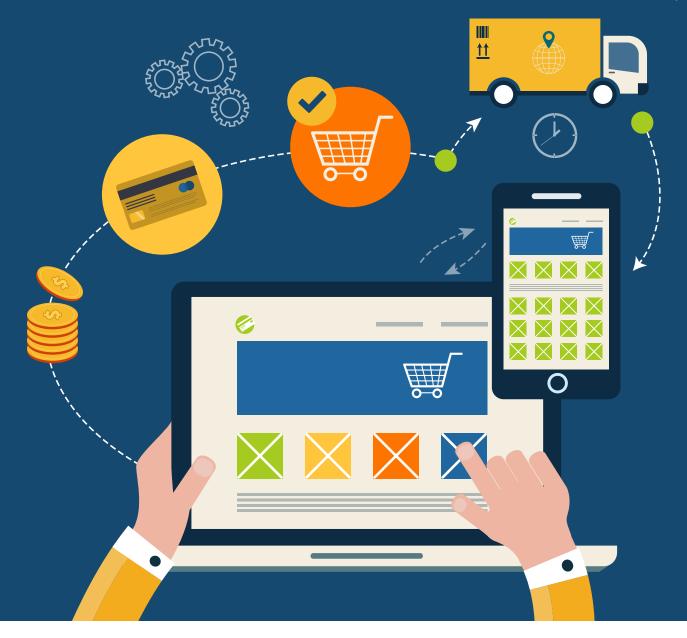# canadian auto dealer

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search...

SPRUCE UP YOUR ONLINE STORE

Best practices for dealership website design

Spruce up your
online store

Best practices for website design seem to change in the blink of an eye. *Canadian auto dealer* offers up tips on what some of the experts have to say about design and functionality — at least today.

Auto dealers know that their online stores have never been more important to their business operations. But with so many rival dealerships clamoring for attention online, how do you make your website a useful destination for potential customers?

It may be easier than you think.

We've uncovered some insights to help you make your website stand out in the crowd. (Hint: Simple is better.)

MAKE IT MOBILE FRIENDLY

As dealers know, customers are just as likely to be shopping for vehicles on their smartphones while standing in line at the grocery store as they are sitting at home on their desktop computers.

If you want your website to get noticed by search engines like Google, it's critical that it can be viewed on any device.

"Just a few years ago we may not have said this [mobile friendliness] would be the first step in building a good website, but because 40-50 per cent of traffic comes from mobile, Google is taking a good hard look at that," said Brent Wees, Partner and "Ambassador of Buzz" at Powered by Dashboard, a product innovation company that develops online tools for the automotive industry. "Google needs to know that your website is a friendly experience for all devices."

Most website developers understand what's involved with designing a mobile-friendly website. Ask yours if your website has been modernized for mobile.

"Quieting down the website to one screen with big pictures and simplified information is a best practice that will retain users."

KNOW WHAT YOUR CUSTOMER WANTS

Your brand messaging is important. But learning about your company is not necessarily why a user is visiting your website.

"It's important to get down to the square root of a happy user. If you provide an environment that allows people to do what they want to do quickly and easily, they're happy and they'll spend more time there," said Wees.

Wees recommends inviting friends, family and customers of varying ages to spend time on your website — using different devices — and watch how they use it. What do they want to do? Where do they go on your site to do it? How easy is it for them to find the information they're searching for?

You may find people fumble over certain buttons or that graphics are not inciting the action intended. These insights may help you come up with a more inviting design.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

When it comes to website design, simplicity trumps all.

"Consumers don't want to see starbursts on a home page with 15 different offers," said Kyle Orlando, COO of edealer.ca, a company specializing in building online marketing solutions for the automotive industry. "They want to see limited and succinct information that will steer them in the direction they want as quickly as possible."

Wees agrees. "Before visiting dealership websites, consumers do a lot of research on manufacturer sites, which tend to be clean and simplified. Dealership sites need to be designed with that same fluid motion."

"Quieting down" the website to one screen with big pictures and simplified information is a best practice that will retain users.

Orlando recommends taking a page from monster online retailers like Amazon.ca and Zappos.com. He points to the simplistic way to use these sites. "You visit the site, pick the product and can then purchase it. They're not taking you to three different description pages where you're hit with 15 different options. It's simple and effective."

INCLUDE INVENTORY

"When you look at Google analytics, inventory is king and always will be, whether it's new or pre-owned," said Wees. "If we know this, don't make it difficult for the user to find the information they're there for."

Orlando says many dealers believe that if they

The true goal of any website is a happy user. It's that simple.

list new inventory and don't have exactly what the consumer is looking for, the potential customer will go elsewhere.

"It's a complete fallacy. Consumers understand that if you don't have the exact vehicle on the lot you can order it for them with any configuration made from the manufacturer. If you have something similar, they'll come in and test drive it."

He says regularly putting up limited inventory is well worth the time.

"Anytime a dealer adds new inventory to their website they'll see a 15 per cent jump in engagement (pages per visit, time on site) and a 10 per cent increase in conversion."

BE TRANSPARENT WITH PRICING

There's no question that consumers are concerned with pricing from dealer to dealer.

They often visit dealer websites to compare.

"They want to know what they'll save before they ever set foot in your dealership door. Why not give it to them?" said Orlando.

He advises being transparent with out-the-door pricing. When a consumer sees a price front and centre on a website it's information they can use and is often the beginning of a trusted relationship.

DON'T WRITE FOR GOOGLE

Though it's important to develop your website in a Google-friendly way, you're crossing the line if you try to write solely for the search engine's benefit. "A lot of people are still writing for Google which is 100 per cent the wrong approach. Write for your user, not for search engines," said Orlando. "If your users are happy, Google is happy."

An example of writing for Google is a blog article full of key words that users search for, but doesn't contain any meaningful information they can use.

"Your users will be irritated. Sure, [the article] has a key word I typed in but it's not relevant to what I'm looking for. You may get short-term gain in traffic to your website, but it's not quality. You're actually pushing people away by not providing them with the information they're seeking."

And if Google detects that you're riddling your website with key words among poor quality content, it's likely that they'll bury your site in search engine rankings.

SHOW WHO YOU ARE

Your website should showcase the sensibility your dealership embodies. Be open about who you are and what you do — just wrap that around a design and content that users can use for their own purposes.

"The true goal of any website is a happy user. It's that simple," said Wees.