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eDealers of the Year:
How They Did It

February 2005

Six Keys to Selling an Additional 200 Vehicles in One Month

At the Sheehy Auto Stores, we sell about 26,000 cars per year across 12 dealerships with 18 franchises and 1,000 employees.

Just two years ago, an organization this size was only getting 904 Internet leads and only selling 103 vehicles across all 12 stores. If 70 percent of the car buyers use the Internet to research and shop for a car, we were missing that opportunity, and we knew it. At that time we were involved in the Internet, but we weren't dedicated.

In April of 2003, our Internet leads shot up to 2,567 and we sold 279 vehicles. Since then, we've been averaging 2,500 leads per month and 254 Internet sales per month with a high of 298 and a goal of 300 sales on average.

I share this with you not to impress you, but to impress upon you that with the right technology, the right marketing strategy, the right people, process and pricing you sell a lot of cars on the Internet. I've summarized Sheehy's six keys to using the Internet to sell cars and encourage you to visit our Web site at www.sheehy.com to learn more.

1. Technology:

Research your options and measure your results. Our system includes a high-end custom Web site, a prospecting and CRM tool that automates much of the e-mail activity and a suite of multi-media e-mails that help drive traffic through bulk e-mail marketing.

2. Marketing Strategy:

Traffic to our Web site has exploded with the use of advanced search engine placement and bulk e-mail marketing. We're able to send thousands of e-mail campaigns that generate measurable traffic with just a few clicks and at no additional cost. Our system enables us to eliminate the poor performing lead providers and only keep those with a high closing ratio like AutoTrader and Dealix. With 12 different dealerships in our group, we get the most bang for the buck by advertising just www.sheehy.com as opposed to 12 different URLs. As a result of our Internet marketing strategy, our cost per sale has dropped to $197.

3. People:

Eight of our 12 stores use an Internet department and the other four use a BDC model, but what sets the super performers apart from the rest is not the business model, it's the people. Recruit, hire and train the right people to staff your department and you can overcome a multitude of other obstacles. We look for rookies with no prior sales experience but with great phone and follow-up skills and we commit to a training program that will get them comfortable with our process, our scripts, our templates and tools.

4. Process:

It's crucial to document your process for handling leads and to map out every step for turning leads into appointments that show. At Sheehy, we've been able to track that if we can set the appointment, our closing ratio is 60 percent. Knowing this, we do everything we can to fine tune our process so that rather than hit the delete key upon receiving one of our e-mails, customers move one step closer to coming in. We also know that the phones are the key to selling appointments. Use technology to automate as much of the process as possible. Build value in the dealership, the people and the product, and you won't have to sell price.

5. Pricing:

Customers in the Washington, D.C., market have computers that are equipped with a delete key, and they're not afraid to use it if you don't answer the question they asked. When they hit the Request a Quote button at our Web site they expect to get a quote, not make a new friend. Knowing this, we respond to all Internet leads with a detailed personal response that includes price and payment information on the vehicle they're interested in, as well as three to four others that are less expensive. We also post MSRP and Internet price online because that's what customers are looking for.

6. Measure/Manage:

Track everything. We always monitor the number of leads by source, response rate and time, number of appointments, appointment percent, show percent, closing percent, cost per lead, response time and cost per sale. This information helps us determine what's working, what's not and when it's time to make an adjustment. One of the best parts about the Internet is that everything is measurable.

If you're interested in knowing more about any of the six keys to using the Internet to sell extra cars, send me an e-mail.

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