



# GOING VIRTUAL

## BRINGING THE DEALERSHIP EXPERIENCE ONLINE IN THE WAKE OF THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Most of American life has been affected by the coronavirus outbreak. With many states issuing stay-at-home recommendations or outright lockdown restrictions, it's clear that daily business will not go on as usual in the near future.

Yet for all the unprecedented issues the coronavirus has brought to the world, engagement in online shopping has never been higher. From groceries to crafts to home office equipment, people are finding ways to purchase the things they need without leaving their homes.

### **That begs the question: Can the online shopping experience translate to vehicle sales?**

Many dealerships have remained open because they provide a critical service — repairing cars for first responders, health care workers and other essential employees, as well as the general public. However, those customers may not be enough to drive adequate sales. Industry experts caution that 2020 car sales — initially expected to reach nearly 16.5

million units in the U.S. — may shrink dramatically due to continued economic challenges.

With stay-at-home regulations, dealerships are now being forced to implement best practices and new ways to service customers with little or no contact. Tactics include pick-up and delivery to customers' homes; curbside “no contact” check-in service; remote test drives and at-home deliveries.

Digital retailing is crucial if dealerships want to continue to successfully communicate with customers and complete sales. Online shopping can — and should — be a seamless experience start to finish for customers.

### **Why isn't digital retailing already working better?**

According to David Boice, CEO of Team Velocity, it's time to RETHINK the concept of digital retailing. “Without proper integration, it's just another stand-alone technology application that doesn't work with anything else,” said Boice. “Too often, pricing and payments within retailing applications don't match email offers, direct mail, digital ads or the dealer's website. By the time the customer clicks ‘Buy Now,’ it's too late. They've already seen four to five different prices and payments for the same vehicle. Can you imagine if Amazon had four different prices for the same product depending on where you engaged? What if the price in the shopping cart was different than all the other prices?” explained Boice.

"Digital retailing is not selling a vehicle online. Digital retailing is selling a trusted experience," said Wesley Gregg, general manager of Gaudin Ford. "All of your products and services you offer need to be accounted for in one digital retail strategy. You have customers who come to your dealership for service and end up buying a vehicle. If done right, this can also happen digitally. It needs to be an entire platform of applications that all work together to provide a relevant experience for customers that is different from the general public, facilitating both service and sales transactions."

"Customers in your database don't want to be treated like a stranger when they visit your website," Gregg continued. "Customers now expect they'll be able to sign in and have a personalized shopping experience, regardless of what they're shopping for. We're excited to be launching a new website platform that allows for this level of personalization and a better customer experience."

Getting dealers to recognize the valuable data points securely stored in their accounting systems is the first step to improving their customer's experience. Not only do dealers have the basics — customer name, address, phone number and email — they also know vehicle year, make, model, trim level, VIN and estimated mileage. In addition, they are able to access vehicle service history, recalls, last service, service due and any recommended services.

Other data, including down payment, payment type and term, payoff, trade value, equity, likely upgrade options, next service visit, preferences and complete shopping history, can be integrated into a customer's own personal website to create the ultimate online dealership experience.

Utilizing this information properly is critical for building and maintaining that positive relationship and for driving sales, especially when in-person interaction is severely limited.

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Customers prefer relevance and personalization. When you give them a customized experience, they are naturally more comfortable. Integrating all known customer information into your technology facilitates a user-friendly and far more enjoyable experience.

"At minimum, your DMS should be totally integrated into your website," Boice said. "Current customers should have a much easier time completing transactions with dealerships they have already done business with. Your customers should be able to complete the entire vehicle purchase online and schedule delivery/pick-up straight to their home."

To stay ahead of the curve, dealers need to re-think current processes to facilitate online transactions and services. To help your dealership make the most of this situation, Boice recommends a few simple ideas:

1. Think like your customer(s).
2. Perform an audit of all distributed offers through all your vendors/mediums.
3. Identify all inconsistent offers
4. Find a solution that integrates all of your marketing and advertising with your website and digital retailing application.

Online shopping experiences with purchasing, trading, valuing and even servicing a customer's vehicle must be unique to them, available remotely and even more seamless than an in-person interaction. Today, a fully integrated virtual customer experience is no longer just a bonus — it's critical to a dealership's success.

