



ENGAGE

No More Lead Traps! How to Improve
the Online Experience to Increase Sales

By Scott Hill & Russ Chandler



PERQ

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About the Authors



Scott Hill is the Executive Chairman and Co-Founder of PERQ, a consumer engagement company established in 2001 (www.perq.com). He's passionate about making digital communication between businesses and consumers much more interactive. This led to the 2016 launch of PERQ Web Engagement, a solution designed to improve the online customer experience by making websites personalized and interactive for consumers. PERQ is now used on 400+ websites to enhance engagement and conversion, increasing offline sales from online traffic. Scott has launched two Inc. 100 companies and is a proud alum of Harvard Business School.



Russ Chandler has more than a decade of experience in the auto industry as a dealer and has seen firsthand the struggle dealerships are faced with in today's digital world. Russ continually strives to improve digital interactions on dealership websites. In 2012, he joined PERQ, and as the Product Marketing Manager works with dealers across the U.S. and Canada to improve and optimize their website experience, while helping to increase their leads and sales. Russ educates the dealership community about online engagement and innovative digital strategies through webinars, speaking engagements, and in publications and on websites such as CBT News, Dealer Marketing and DrivingSales.

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Introduction

The average consumer spends 5 hours a week shopping online.

73% of consumers start their shopping journey with Amazon or Google.

Consumers only visit 1 to 2 dealerships in person before purchasing a vehicle.

Consumers today are expert researchers. When we plan to make an important purchase, we start by going online to gain information. This is so well known and understood that companies are making their websites much more of an experience. They're designing websites so consumers spend more time with the brand, enjoy doing online research more and ultimately guide them to make the next step toward a purchase.

Just look at the progression in the last few years online across multiple industries that improved the research experience a consumer completes prior to purchase...

Google: Kicked off the research trend by making it easy for consumers to type a few words into search to be presented with an unlimited amount of information to review.

Amazon: Took the experience of an online purchase to a new level with personalization, recommendations for additional purchase, consumer reviews, etc.

Zillow/Trulia: Became the go-to portals for beginning home research. Get an estimate valuation of your home, calculate utilities, get a walkability score, find out about the local area, etc.

Dollar Shave Club: Went from a startup to a \$1 billion valuation in 5

years purely by creating a better way to research and purchase razors online. I put this one in here to highlight how much the desire for online research has penetrated even the cheapest of consumer goods.

Cars.com/KBB/Edmunds/AutoTrader/Etc.: Made researching a car much easier, despite a love/hate relationship from dealers. They help consumers get all the info they may need to determine their trade value, payment, local pricing comparisons and see most of the vehicles available in their area.

Auto Manufacturers: Improved their websites to try to give a better research experience. From virtual test drives to building out a custom car, these websites are now designed to help a buyer go as deep in their research as they want, all from the comfort of their home or mobile device.

Consumers want to research and be guided in their decision making on **THEIR own time and under THEIR own terms, and not be forced to talk to a salesperson.**

We consumers LOVE to research our purchases both big and small. The enjoyment of online research has replaced "browsing" in retail stores and that includes car dealerships. We are now expert researchers, and we don't want or need to be sold in the traditional sense. Consumers want to research and be guided in their decision making on THEIR own time and under THEIR own terms, and not be forced to talk to a salesperson.

We want to take our research as far as we possibly can to decide WHERE we are going to purchase before we need the additional help of a salesperson. We really appreciate those businesses that make this research an enjoyable experience (more time on website) and we try

to avoid those that don't (bounce quickly). It's about the gratification that comes with 100% confidence you made the right decision and got the best deal as a consumer. The "best deal" isn't driven by price but by the experience and perspective of each consumer.



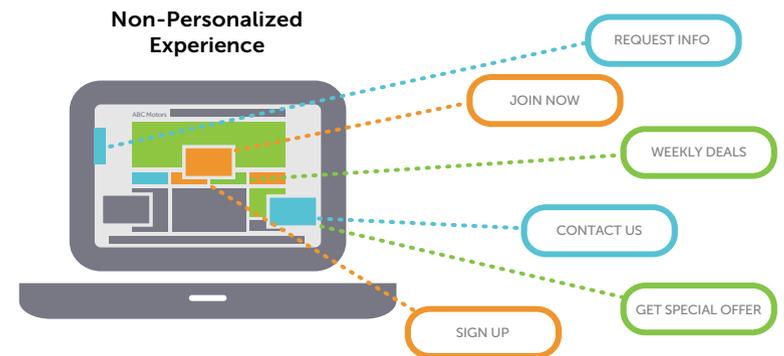
You Revised Your Showroom Experience, Why Not Your Website?

Let's now review today's car buying experience from just a short time period ago. Auto dealers had become very aware of how consumers felt about the car buying process and made drastic changes to improve the in-store purchase experience to fit today's consumer expectations.

From a personal greeting, a more consultant-like sales process, and an improved in-store environment with waiting areas, Wi-Fi, playrooms and cafés, dealers have made a big leap forward in how they approach, sell and differentiate their dealership to meet the shopping expectations of today's consumers. A dealer would HATE to be known to the public as a super slick salesman that uses a variety of tricks to get a shopper to buy a car. They know a consumer HATES this and any short-term value occasionally gained from taking this approach is not worth the overall long-term brand destruction.

But, if we take a close look at most dealership website experiences and compare them to the evolution of dealership showrooms, we quickly see it hasn't kept up with the "expert researcher" expectations of consumers.

From the consumer perspective, dealership websites feel more like the 1980's sales slickster than a great online research experience that fits the expectations they have when shopping online. Whether they're shopping for a simple razor or looking to spend \$50,000 on a vehicle, consumers have come to expect an easy, personalized and informative shopping experience.



All too often, however, dealership websites are overwhelming, consumers say, and the experience feels like 7 different sales people shouting 7 different offers all at once in the hopes of getting a lead. Shoppers can feel as though everything on a dealer website is designed to trap them into purely giving up information so that they can become a target of a salesperson. In the industry, we even use the word "CAPTURE" when discussing consumers and the goal of the website.

Dealers are optimizing the whole website around just the transaction, thinking if they point everything towards making a purchase right now, it will shorten the sales cycle. Unfortunately, that's not

what wins over an expert researcher. Let's just bust that myth right now by pointing out that roughly half of the traffic on an average dealership's website is from consumers NOT in the buy phase of the shopping journey. The entire website experience is set up purely to display product and price, and then a series of lead traps, which scares consumers away.



I like to refer to this as "lead trap avoidance" because it makes the consumer feel like prey and the dealer the hunter. Consumers avoid these traps and learn how to navigate around them.

Dealers have tried to solve "lead trap avoidance" by employing some interactive experiences like a trade appraisal tool or a chat feature, but instead of creating a great experience, they're still too focused on capturing a lead. Consumers who decide to go through this experience find the chat feature was nothing more than a way to capture lead information and have a salesperson call them.

When website visitors are utilizing the interactive experiences available, they aren't feeling more informed and are smart enough to realize the tools weren't set up to help them, but were a fancier trap instead. The same can be said of digital retailing tools today. They're not very well connected to any action already taken on the website. It's just a more complicated and elaborate "lead trap."

The current website experience lists product/price with either a series of static lead form traps or disconnected forms, interactive experiences and chat. When we talk to consumers, they continually tell us they HATE this. What value are you providing to them on your website?

If your dealership showroom provided this same experience of having multiple sales reps, shouting multiple offers, never remembering a customer's name or helping educate them toward a sale, you would be horrified and make immediate changes. Yet, this same experience is happening on your website to thousands of consumers right now. You may believe your brand is being built around the much improved in-dealership experience you've created, but it is being destroyed by the online one you continue to tolerate.

The whole foundation of this traditional strategy is to try and trap the consumer on your website into talking with a salesperson. The best lead traps in the market are those that provide value to the expert researcher without requiring an interaction with a salesperson. However, the problem still lies on the dealership side where a salesperson will work the lead as if it was a request to be contacted.

*You can create a website where
a consumer **WANTS** to give you
information because they're instantly
being provided more value for doing so.*

More forms, more tools from third-party providers and now chat have all created this mess of an experience. It was never anyone's intent to have a messy experience, it just evolved that way because the technology did not exist to have a solution that could be both a great experience and generate leads and sales. That has changed.

What the Dealership Website Experience Should Be

Today's dealer website experience should be much more of a guided research experience where each action taken makes the next better, where consumers can keep learning more and be guided into the best decision for them. You can create a website where a consumer WANTS to give you information because they're instantly being provided more value for doing so.

Consumers want the "self-service" experience because they're so used to getting it everywhere else online. Let's be clear in saying this isn't about removing the salesperson from the experience. It's about repositioning the salesperson to assist the online researcher instead of acting like a hunter on the other end of a trap.

*Don't let your salesperson
act like a hunter.*

Dealerships should learn from the great online research experiences that already exist. Build an online experience so a consumer is willing to spend a lot of time on your site because you've helped them research how to spend \$50,000.

The rewards for building this great experience are immense:

- *Improve engagement and time spent on your dealership site dramatically.*
- *Create positive feelings about your dealership and increase brand recognition.*
- *Increase lead volume and quality.*
- *Receive richer consumer profiles on the leads with much clearer insight into which leads are better than others.*
- *End the game and frustration of individual tool attribution.*
- *Better measure the sales generation performance of your website with better lead source origination attribution.*
- *Have a much better database to lead nurture for better sales generation in the future.*

Meet the online research experience demands of today's consumers, and you will get the lead and sales results you are after.

Follow These 3 Phases to Improve Your Online Customer Experience to Drive More Showroom Sales

- ▶ *Phase 1: Create an Engaging Web Experience*
- ▶ *Phase 2: Personalize Your Website for Consumers*
- ▶ *Phase 3: Improve Your Results*

You don't have to get a new website to create a great experience. Website providers offer the infrastructure to house your inventory, provide navigation and are set up for excellent search engine optimization. Your website provider has to keep up to make sure these three areas are kept up-to-date. The experience piece is what comes on top of this infrastructure and what you can acquire from a third-party vendor.

At PERQ, we like to present 5 Keys around how to take a dealer's existing website and turn it into a great web experience for superior results:

 **Make it Smart**

 **Make it Interactive**

 **Connect Everything**

 **Have an Engagement Score**

 **Measure and Benchmark "Lead to Sale"**

Make it Smart

All of the great websites offering the research experience today's consumer wants and expects are "Smart." The websites learn and adapt based on the actions the consumer makes. You can accomplish this by leveraging behavior targeting, combined with adding dynamic images and Calls To Action (CTAs), and making sure the website remembers and adapts to all of the information learned as the shopper interacts with your site. Once you incorporate this onto your site, the following become possible:

1. Personalization: The website personalizes the experience to the individual versus treating everyone the same. Use the consumer's name and show CTAs relevant to them by observing what they are clicking on or what information they have already shared with you.

2. Memory: The website should be able to learn and remember the visitor. When a visitor returns to your website, are they greeted and treated the same way you would a returning visitor in your dealership, or are they treated like they have never been there before? Your website should allow the consumer to pick up their research from where they left off by remembering what they have done.

3. Dynamic: Once you are learning more about the individual and remembering everything they have done, your website needs to be able to change images and CTAs that will assist the consumer in the next stage of their research.

Which experience would you value more?

Dealership Website Scenario 1:

All the messaging is for new cars when you are specifically looking for a used truck.

It asks you to "Value Your Trade" after you already did a trade valuation.

You get asked for your name over and over again in forms across the site.

You have to start your search and give the dealership all of your information when you return because it forgets who you are.

Dealership Website Scenario 2:

Offers change based on what you were searching for.

Once you give your trade information, the site uses it to help you understand your monthly payments better on all vehicles.

Once you give your name, it is used and never forgotten, and when you come back to the website, you're greeted by name.

The information you already shared is stored and you're not repeatedly being asked to re-enter the same information over and over.

Common sense from serving people in-person makes the answer obvious in the dealership website scenarios, but when it comes to the website, the previous technology capabilities did not allow common sense to be leveraged in creating a Smart experience.

Make it Interactive

You would never create a showroom where all you have is a list of vehicles, prices and then a bunch of forms people could fill out if they want more information. That would be a horrible experience. It's the reason why great websites try to create a more interactive experience to make the shopping experience online better.

Just like you employ a sales team to consult potential buyers and help the decision making process, your website needs to do the same. Consumers will GLADLY share a lot of information about themselves if they know it is for the purpose of helping their research. However, they will never provide a lot of info if they know it is purely for a dealer's database or sales rep. The average static lead form has a 6% click to lead rate, but an interactive form converts at 18%!

Two-Way Communication Versus One-Way Communication

Visitors will gladly give you their information if you make your website as interactive as possible where two-way, real-time communication becomes possible between the consumer and the website instead of one-way communication.

One-Way Communication: A static lead form is an example of one-way communication. A consumer gives information, but then that is the end of it. It is rare for a person to fill this out, but even when they do, you have trained them to leave your website and go to a competitor's after they fill it out. Data shows that an average consumer leaves a dealer's website 40 seconds after filling out a static lead form. There is nothing left for them to do!

*Data shows that an average consumer leaves a dealer's website **40 seconds** after filling out a static lead form.*

Two-Way Communication: An example of two-way *interactive* communication is the online trade valuation you are familiar with. These convert at such a great rate and are valued by dealers and consumers because there is MUTUAL value being gained. A consumer fills out a trade valuation because it doesn't require a salesperson, but provides him with information. There is no such mutual value created in a static lead form. Try to have as much two-way interaction with online visitors as possible.

Interactive website experiences to increase two-way communication:

 **Interactive Welcome**

 **Trade Appraisals**

 **Customized Payment Calculator**

 **Incentive Qualifier**

 **Assessments** (such as helping people determine if they should lease or buy or decide which vehicle model will work for their lifestyle)

 **Personalized Special Offer Unlocks**

 **Instant Pre-Approved Credit Amounts**

 **Market Price Comparison Reporting**

 **Appointment Schedulers** (such as Test Drive)

Connect Everything

Today's technology allows for you to take all of your interactive experiences, your Smart CTAs and connect them together to keep building on the consumer experience. A consumer should be able to engage with whatever first experience they desire, and from there, the website immediately adapts and serves up the next experience that can add to their research.

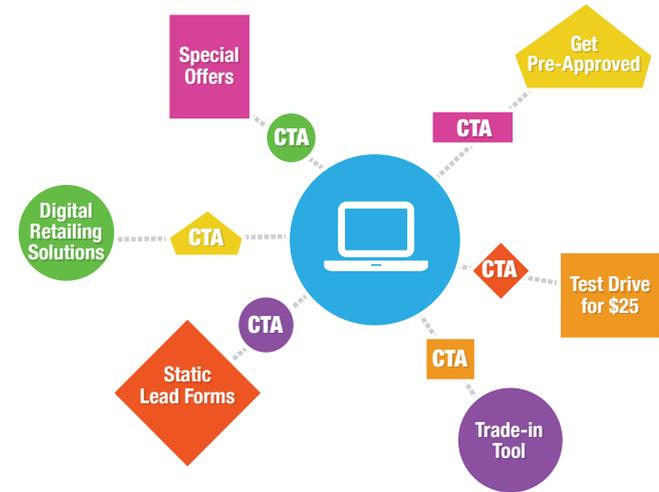
Any time you have a variety of third-party tools on your website or "dumb" static lead forms, you are killing the experience by not having them connected. It makes your brand look bad by not helping a consumer online the way they have come to expect from other websites. If you aren't helpful online, why should they expect you to be helpful at the dealership?

*Consumers will **GLADLY** share a lot of information about themselves if they know it is for the purpose of helping their research.*

A great salesperson is able to take whatever question a consumer asks or whatever information he shared, and start building on that to guide a consumer in their decision-making process and lead them to a sale.

A salesperson greets a prospect, finds out their name and what they are looking for, helps them decide which model might be best, tries to get an idea of their credit, finds out if they have a trade-in, and starts talking potential payments all in a manner that feels connected and smooth.

A great website can do this by helping a consumer in their decision making and lead them to a sale at your dealership by having a smooth



Disconnected



Smart / Interactive / Connected

flow in collecting information and serving up the next step. This is not possible with multiple disconnected tools on your website.

This isn't just about the technology and back-end integration, it's about providing a connected experience for the consumer. There are going to be times — from a technology standpoint — you're going to struggle to make it perfect. Where the technology is lacking in perfect integration, make up for it by connecting elements on your site as good as possible.

Have an Engagement Score

All leads are NOT created equal. A highly engaged website visitor will become a lead that includes beneficial consumer profile information. Successfully keeping visitors engaged on your website means that profile data will be continually updated in your CRM.

In today's lead "capture" world, once a dealership acquires a lead, they typically don't want to see that consumer as a "duplicate" because it clutters up a CRM. However, our data has shown that if a consumer goes through multiple interactive experiences, they are 3 TIMES as likely to purchase as someone who just fills out one form.

Instead of being so concerned about clearing out duplicates and then trying to figure out which vendor tool you should give 100% attribution to, you should be working on ways to understand what combination of interactions increase the likelihood of a purchase. The smarter and more interactive you make your website, you'll start to see these benefits:

- *Consumers will spend more time on your website.*
- *They'll interact more with your website in a way that allows you to capture more consumer profile data.*
- *Online visitors will be more likely to communicate and visit your in-store dealership after investing so much time with you online.*

At PERQ, we have a simple, but effective, way of measuring and reporting engagement, which we'll cover more in depth in Phase 3 of this book.

*If a consumer goes through multiple interactive experiences, they are **3 TIMES** as likely to purchase as someone who just fills out one form.*

This allows us to be able to have an effective way to evaluate how much time visitors spent reviewing vehicles, and also get a better understanding of how deeply they researched one or more of those vehicles. The higher the score, the better the lead and traffic source from where that lead originated from. The lower scores might indicate they aren't ready to be prospected yet by a sales rep or a change in where you're spending advertising budget. Best of all, it gives your website an overall "Engagement Score" that can be used as a benchmark to constantly work to improve.

Measure and Benchmark "Lead to Close"

Once your website has been set up for a better experience and you are looking at overall web engagement rather than individual tool attribution, you can focus in on the most important metric: Lead to Close.

Dealers won't care as much about what tool consumers engaged with when they're successfully getting visitors to interact with their website. It's all about understanding how deep consumers engaged on the website overall and then measuring whether they purchased.

You will find those shoppers that engaged the longest convert the highest, but the way to improve the metric overall is to improve your follow-up and nurturing processes. This Lead to Close metric is

extremely important because it enables you to work on all other sales and marketing enhancements and review whether you improved.

I know this might sound like a no-brainer, but many dealers are still not focusing enough on this part of the conversion process. For those of you who are already consistently tracking lead to close, I advise you to break into the layers inside this conversion to drive an increase.

Let me breakdown the layers of conversion inside lead to close:

- 1 **Lead to contact**
- 2 **Contact to appointment set**
- 3 **Appointment set to appointment show**
- 4 **Show to test drive**
- 5 **Test drive to sale**
- 6 **Lead to sale without contact**

We'll focus more on analyzing your lead to sale and other metrics to improve dealership processes in Phase 3. Analyzing lead to sale, and all the layers in-between, will provide you tremendous value in how you manage your dealership. Our customers all are focused on the Engagement Score and the Lead to Close. The dealers who have focused on providing a great experience to website visitors while capturing a lead have been effective at increasing their Lead to Close metric.



Higher Conversion



Increase in Sales

a huge impact. However, a commonly untapped opportunity to improve lead to sale is in the experience the online consumer gets when you capture the lead. Do you think they feel like they're being caught in a trap or happy about their decision to share information about themselves? If any of your leads feel caught in a trap, it's going to have a major impact on your lead to sale conversion rate.



Visit perq.com/auto-dealer-software/ to learn how to create a connected experience on your dealership's website.

PHASE 2

Personalize Your Website for Consumers

Now that you have an understanding of the “Five Keys” to transform your website into the kind of guided experience today’s consumers will appreciate, let’s dive into what a complete experience can look like. We have a philosophy at PERQ that we use to improve the consumer experience that is guided by two core questions we always ask ourselves as we create new experiences in our platform:

1. “Does this experience reflect how a dealership aspires to treat people in their store?”

2. “Would a big brand that consumers are known to enjoy online be doing this?”

I think you will see a combination of these two questions in the example experience below.

Keeping a Clean Website While Adding to the Experience

As we walk through what a potential experience could look like, you must understand the importance of informing consumers about all they can do, without cluttering up your website. Dealers can do this through messaging that adapts based on the actions and answers from a consumer on your smart, interactive and connected website experience.

Current Dealership Website

Calls-to-Action (CTAs) are dropped all over the website, shouting every possible way to engage to a consumer regardless of whether the message is right for them or not. There are buttons, banners and sidebars everywhere screaming at the consumer and they never change based on what you learned about the visitor. Even though a consumer may have already given their information once or already answered a question through a lead form or tool on your site, they annoyingly are asked for the same information over and over again.

What Dealership Websites Should Be

If a consumer is looking at trucks at your dealership and has asked questions about a special offer and also inquired what he can get for his trade, your salesperson is going to take that information and then move it toward the correct next step for that individual. The salesperson isn’t going to keep talking about special offers on other vehicle types, isn’t going to keep asking about their trade-in and isn’t going to forget the prospect’s name. Instead, the salesperson is going to take that information and narrow it down for the correct next step that best encourages the consumer to move forward toward a purchase and utilize the prospect’s name.

Your website should be doing the same. Every single action taken by a visitor on your website and every answer to a question given should be used to adapt the CTAs and messaging on your website to make it easier for the shopper to continue onto the next step.

How a Dealership Takes Steps to Improve their Website

Personalize Your Website: Your CTAs and interactive experiences on your website should be working together to create a unique experience for each individual. This is accomplished by leveraging behavioral targeting and smart pathing.

Behavioral Targeting - Dealerships can target a visitor’s behavior by utilizing cookies on the website that track pages he has visited, what vehicles he has clicked on to learn more, and how long he has been on a particular item. Just like a salesperson adapts messaging based on what they observed inside the dealership, your website can leverage behavioral targeting the same way. By connecting your CTAs to the actions a consumer is taking on your site, it allows for cleaner yet more powerful messaging.

Smart Pathing - Utilize your website’s memory to record every answer and interaction a visitor gives in your interactive

experiences to dynamically change the experience questions and CTAs based on information given. For example, if a consumer goes through a trade calculator experience, and he informs you he is looking for a truck and plans to finance with your dealership, then you have gained some valuable information to personalize the next steps of the experience.

- ***You can now remove all Value Your Trade CTAs. The consumer already did this, so you don't need to keep taking up space asking them to do something they already did.***
- ***You can now start promoting truck offers since they told you they are looking for a truck. That means any banner that promotes an offer on a vehicle other than trucks is wasted space.***
- ***You can now tee up financing pre-approval options to help take the consumer further down the buying process.***

Ultimately, creating a great experience hinges on the ability to have a smart, interactive and connected website as we covered in Phase 1. You can keep personalizing the experience leveraging what you learn about the consumer. From the very beginning of a visitor landing on your home page to someone building out a deal for their vehicle of interest, the website should keep learning and keep adapting to fit the personal path unique to each consumer to help them down the path of purchasing a vehicle.

The Welcome

Current Dealership Website

The current experience when a consumer lands on a dealership home page looks like this:

- ***Try to figure out the dealer's website navigation to get to the information I'm really looking for.***
- ***Try to see through the multiple screaming offers that may or may not apply.***

- ***Try to close out the multiple "Chat Now" offers that are popping up repeatedly even though I have given no indication I might be ready to purchase.***

Look at the above again. This is how EVERY dealership website experience begins. The in-store equivalent would be walking into a dealership and having multiple salespeople come after you and just start shouting offers and saying: "Talk now?, Talk now?, Talk now?" It's experiences online like this that make consumers feel like everything on the site is trying to "capture" their information and that the dealership only cares about sales, not helping the consumer.

You would be turned off by the same experience, so why are you providing an impersonal experience on your website? You would never let your dealership showroom experience be like this. Other dealerships are doing this right now on their websites, so it's up to you to differentiate your dealership website by allowing the consumer to relax a bit more and enjoy the buying process. And, in the end, it will help you to sell more vehicles.

Differentiate your dealership website by allowing the consumer to relax a bit more and enjoy the buying process. And, in the end, it will help you to sell more vehicles.

What Dealership Websites Should Be

We know first impressions in life matter. You want the consumer to land on your website and have the reaction: "Oh, this dealership website is different. Wow, they are trying to really help me." If you can cause a more positive reaction the first time a consumer comes to your website, this will carry over into a higher percentage of them engaging with other resources on your site and spending more time with you.

What do you do in your actual dealership when someone walks in? You greet them, you introduce yourself and ask their name, you ask what brought them in today to see if you can help them, you inform them of anything special that might be going on and then you guide them to the area of your dealership to begin the process.

All of this is common sense in person at a dealership, but seems to have been forgotten when designing the online experience. By creating a smart, interactive and connected website, you can now leverage the same common sense you have in your dealership showroom.

Try these 6 tips on your website to make a visitor feel welcome, which encourages them to engage and spend more time on site:

1. Greeting

You need a greeting that introduces your dealership, educates them around why your website experience is different, and begins personalizing and helping. This can be done with a side dock that expands on first visit. Educate them, and then ask a simple question.

2. How Can I Assist You Today?

Now that they know you are trying to help, you can now ask a question that visitors will answer because they know it is to HELP them, NOT SELL them.

3. What is Your Name?

Now that they know you are helping, ask for their contact info, but make it clear you're asking so that you can personalize their experience and help remember the visitor's information when they revisit the website.

We also like to incentivize this stage because we understand that consumers will give fake information just to move onto the next stage. We like being able to offer a "Bonus: Enter to Win a 3-Year Lease" and make it clear the information given will be used to notify the winner. The data accuracy jumps up much higher.

4. John, Here is What You Should Know.

Now that they have told you what they are looking for and their name, personalize your next communication back to them. Let's say that "John" told you he was looking at new trucks. You can now inform him with, "John, our current offers on new trucks are..." and list them out. This is personalizing and tailoring specific offers to the needs of John, not randomly shouting every offer you have available.

5. Take John to the New Trucks Section of Your Website.

As soon as you have communicated the offers, take John to the category he is looking for on your website. At your physical dealership, once you knew what John was looking for, you would help guide him to that category of vehicles, right? You can do this on your website as well.

6. Never Ask for Their Contact Information or the Same Question Again.

They already told you their name, email and maybe even a phone number. Asking for contact info again to interact with your website or making them repeat an answer is just as rude as a salesperson repeatedly doing it at the dealership. This is where having your website be "Smart" and "Connected" come into play.

I think you can see from the above flow that this matches up much better to how we know a person likes to be helped in person, and it matches up to the websites of brands we love as well. This first step dramatically establishes your website as a place where the car buying experience is going to be better.

After all, if you are bettering the experience online, John will also expect you are bettering the experience in-person and it becomes more likely he makes the trip to your auto dealership. Like all things in life, the first impression is key to get this feeling of trust and respect started.

Deciding What Vehicle Is Best

Current Dealership Website

Currently, John would end up on an SRP page and be able to scroll through all the vehicles you have available. It's possible there are some informative pages on the dealership site, but even then the content is generally non-personalized and low-quality content to read through. This is where consumers get overwhelmed and many times head off to third-party sites, where the experience is optimal for research. Would you ever allow this to be the experience at your dealership?

What Dealership Websites Should Be

If someone goes over to the trucks you have available, and you can tell they are trying to sort through all you have to offer, you try to help them narrow their decision, right? When John is on Amazon, they help him try to narrow down his potential choices by making recommendations. Similarly, your dealership website should also be improving the research phase for John, not just showing your inventory.

How to Help the Consumer Online

First Name
Last Name
Phone #
Email Address
Type your message here...
Submit

VS

What's your ideal purchase time frame?
Now 2 Weeks 1 Month

Assessments: People LOVE to find out more about themselves. Self-quizzes are popular because people enjoy the process of sharing about themselves and then having someone/something tell them even more about themselves. Look at all the fun self-quizzes on Facebook, look at the popularity of websites like BuzzFeed. They work.

Example Assessments

1. *What's your model match?*
2. *Should I lease or finance?*
3. *Should I buy new or used?*
4. *Is certified pre-owned right for me?*
5. *What warranty should I get?*
6. *Should I buy model A or model B (two top competing models, example Accord vs. Civic)*
7. *What's right for me, gas or diesel?*

At the end of each assessment, there is an answer given and then you can direct them to that specific vehicle, model type, etc. on your website: "John, you match up best to ABC MODEL TYPE," and you can even repeat or tailor a specific offer to this type.

Example questions that are asked of the consumer in order to give a vehicle model recommendation:

1. *How big is your household?* Answer selection: Just me, Me and a lot of stuff, A couple, A small family, A big family
2. *What do you use your vehicle for?* Answer selection: Kids to practice, Commute to work, Camping, Hauling heavy things, Drive around town

3. What's most important to you? Answer selection: Fuel economy, Performance, Space, Technology

4. What type of roads do you typically drive? Answer selection: All kinds of roads, Neighborhoods, Highway/Interstate, Country roads, City Roads

5. How important is four-wheel and/or all-wheel drive? Answer selection: Top priority, Pretty important, Slightly important, Don't care

John will willingly give you all kinds of information about himself if he knows it is a quiz where he can get an answer at the end that helps him learn more. Both you and John win! John enjoyed the help, learned more about himself and what vehicle to research further, and you gained a lot more information on this lead. John knows you are more helpful than any other dealer website he visited, and you know more about John than any other dealer.

Assessments are your way as a business to still influence consumer decisions. With most consumers shopping online instead of in store, salespeople don't get the same opportunity to influence decisions because they simply aren't present when they get made. Assessments and other deeply engaging interactions allow your brand a way back into the picture to help influence the consumer during the research phase.



Schedule a demo of our PERQ Web Engagement software to see how assessments help engage consumers on your dealership's website.

Visit us at perq.com/auto-dealer-software

Being present and adding value early on with consumers will return a high payout later on, when they're ready to go from online to visiting your showroom. Being the first dealership to engage with a customer creates a larger window of time to win his trust and open lines of communication to support online research. Remember,

consumers don't want to be sold, but they will accept help in their research. Assisting consumers in this way is just a different way of selling them if the goal is to influence them into a purchase. Assessments open all kinds of doors in all phases of the buyer's journey online.

Researching an Actual Vehicle

Current Dealership Websites

Dealers tend to have a lot of tools available on the website designed to help with researching a vehicle. Trade tools, market pricing tools, comparison tools, CARFAX tools, digital retailing tools, etc. Some are just resources and some are designed to be lead traps. While this information is usually available, **it is not a helpful, guided experience**. Having all these tools is the equivalent of having a bunch of specific brochures available sitting next to each vehicle at your dealership. It's better than nothing, but they're just resources. If I do one of the current trade calculator tools, that is the end of it. If a car shopper asked you for a trade appraisal at your dealership, you wouldn't give them an estimate and then send them on their way. You'd continue to engage with them so they ultimately purchase a vehicle.

What Dealership Websites Should Be

At your dealership, you are relying on any information given to you by the consumer to tee up the next step. Consumers WANT to be helped towards a purchase (BUT NOT SOLD!). The biggest difference between currently offering a bunch of resources and turning it into a guided and helpful experience is the "Connected" piece of the 5 keys.

Your website tools should all be connected so that once a consumer has interacted with one of your resources/tools available, it should work with the other tools to encourage and help the next step in that individual's buying process.

Currently, if John goes through a trade value tool, that is the end of it. John got the trade-in value and you got the lead. What it should be

is just a first step into moving the consumer toward a purchase just like you would in the dealership. John expressed interest in building towards a deal with your dealership, your website should continue to prompt John to move forward just like you would in store.

How to Connect the Tools on Your Dealership Website

Every single one of your “tools” and resources should be connected to work together harmoniously to encourage and help move the visitor to the next step. For example, let’s utilize the path John took previously:

- 1. John was greeted and helped.**
- 2. He was offered assessments and directed to specific models.**
- 3. He’s now reviewing the actual vehicles he is considering.**

At this point, John is reviewing whether there is a vehicle he wants and determining whether it is worth taking the next steps with you. Here is where you offer additional help:

- 1. Trade Value**
- 2. Schedule Test Drive**
- 3. Personalize Payments**
- 4. Request More Info**
- 5. Market Pricing**
- 6. Check for Special Offers**
- 7. Confirm Availability**
- 8. Calculate Payments**
- 9. Get Pre-Qualified**
- 10. Get Pre-Approved**
- 11. Make an Offer**

The key is that whatever John decides to interact with next, is just the first step. He opens up that tool and resource, it doesn’t put up a gate of asking for contact info (you already have this), and when the information is given, it tees up the next step that is most likely to help and lead to a purchase.

If John wanted to compare market pricing, he should then be encouraged in an easy step to do a trade valuation. If he did a trade valuation, he should then be encouraged to take the next step of personalizing his payments or schedule a test drive. When he is offered a test drive, it should be able to be done with just a couple of clicks to pick a date and time.

Make it easy for visitors online by giving them the next step to move them down the buying funnel.

Everything currently on a dealership’s website operates independently and never remembers John’s other selections. John has to really want to take another step forward to make the effort to engage with another tool. This would be like making John seek out the next person to speak to in your dealership to make a purchase. John would gladly keep sharing more information with you and going deeper in his experience with your dealership, but he isn’t going to put a bunch of work around determining what to do next, where to go get the information or having to repeat himself.

Make it EASY! Tee up the next step for your visitor online and leverage the information they have already provided to make it a no-brainer to continue forward rather than bouncing onto a competitor’s site.

Online Car Shopping Journey



Digital Retailing

Current Dealership Websites

Today's term "digital retailing" can mean many things. It can be basic tools to start your deal online all the way down to literally completing the transaction online. However, regardless of what "digital retailing" functionality your dealership has, it is still a disconnected experience.

Digital retailing should be thought of as an experience consumers want and not just from a technical perspective about functionality. When digital retailing products are built from the dealership perspective, they're being optimized as if they were being used by dealership employees. Consumers don't think like that and never will. That's why most products in this space are full of functionality and integrations but fail on many levels of performance.

Often times, digital retailing products restrict the impact to a dealer's bottom line, not by functionality, but by the fact very few consumers like the experience enough to use it. This is often due to the fact that these products are still disconnected from all the other interactions on the site. The digital retailing tools do not connect to any forms,

chat, assessments, guides or other tools. Optimizing your whole site to just be one big shopping cart is like asking someone to do paperwork when they first step onto your lot.

You have to get them to the point they are ready to buy before approaching them with a "Buy Now" CTA. This means you must create a CONNECTED website experience.

Today's digital retailing products are set up as a linear path of steps to be completed the same way by everyone. We know that is not how car buying works. How many people walk onto your lot saying "I want to work my deal" before doing any other step at the dealership?

Optimizing your whole site to just be one big shopping cart is like asking someone to do paperwork when they first step onto your lot.

Car buying is a series of small steps in a journey that is different for everyone, not a straight linear path that every consumer does the same way. You are neglecting the vast majority of shoppers on your website if the only segment you are talking to are those who are ready to start their paperwork. That is no way to generate the highest ROI or get the best conversion.

What Dealership Websites Should Be

Regardless of how advanced your digital retailing offering is, it needs to have flexible starting points and a flexible flow based on what visitors first engaged with online when starting to research a vehicle. A consumer shouldn't have already taken many steps in researching a vehicle, and then be told they need to, "Make My Deal."

If a consumer has done a trade valuation on your site, they have

ALREADY started the deal making process. Your digital retailing solution needs to adapt to that beginning point a consumer chooses and then dynamically adjust to encourage the consumer to go deeper toward making a deal.

Consumers utilize the dealership's website from the beginning to the end of their online shopping process for a multitude of reasons through multiple website sessions. The future buyers on your website are leaving and coming back to complete a series of research steps that eventually lead to the transaction. The digital retail experience isn't just the transaction functionality, it's everything that happens from beginning to end.

How many deals would you get at your dealership if you let the consumer look at a vehicle and then need to hit a "Start My Deal" button in order to purchase a vehicle? The entire experience at the dealership and the salesperson is used to move them toward purchasing a vehicle. Your website and digital retailing solution should work together to do the same.

Usage of Chat

Current Dealership Website

Chat tools are great at helping a consumer on a website. But 90% of dealers are not utilizing chat to help the consumer, they are using it as another "lead trap" to capture a visitor's information, making the visitor have to talk to a salesperson. This is in an awful experience and immediately makes a consumer feel foolish for falling into a trap.

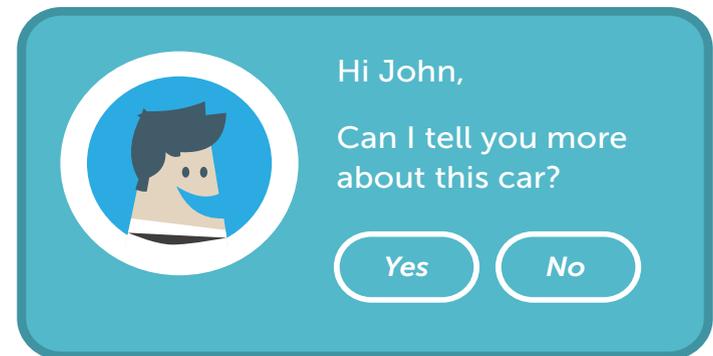
A consumer initially engaged with chat to get information to add to their research. If they wanted to just give information so that a salesperson could call them, they would have called or filled out a static lead form. The consumer wanted to chat, so get your sales team to chat with the prospect online and not force them into a communication channel they didn't want to take. By doing this, you immediately establish yourself as a dealership who plans on

using any trick necessary to get a sale. I don't believe that is the image you are going after.

Chat is also left as a constant, "Chat Now" on a dealer's website. While this is fine, it is not the best practice we know that helps a consumer because it's not what you train your sales team to do in-person at the dealership. Do you allow your sales team to just wait for the customer to walk over to them when they are ready to talk, or does your sales team look for way to engage and start a conversation based on the actions the prospect is taking on your lot?

What Dealership Websites Should Be

If John was at the dealership and blew off the first attempted interaction with a salesperson, there are only a few ways to know when it is appropriate to interrupt him again with a question that seems helpful. A salesperson is trained to look for those moments on when to make it easy for the consumer to start engaging. The salesperson knows there are sweet spots that make it easier to ask a question or provide a suggestion that helps to get the conversation started. When on the website, this actually becomes much easier, yet, no one is doing it well.



Using Chat to Engage Visitors

Here are places where Chat can be personalized for John to try to get him to actually engage with an actual salesperson:

After an Assessment is Completed

A consumer just went through an assessment on your website and was told what vehicle or body style would be right for them. This would be a great place to offer up a, “John, can I tell you more about this vehicle?” with your chat prompt. No pressure, just reminding John it is an option.

After a Trade Value is Done

John just found out his vehicle is worth X dollars. This is a perfect time to offer up a, “John, do you think it should be higher? Chat now.”

After a Market Value Check

John just dove into an experience to see how your price compares to local market pricing. This is a great chance to prompt a question like “John, can I tell you more about this vehicle?”.

Payment Structuring/Digital Retailing

We know that once someone engages with these types of experiences, they are very far down the purchase funnel. We also know that very few complete the full steps of forming an actual deal. While someone is engaged with this experience, it is a perfect time to prompt a, “John, can I help save you time in figuring out a deal?”

Personalizing a question, timed around an action a prospect has taken, has proven to be the best way to get someone to engage on your lot. The same strategy works on your website.

How to Tell if Your Website is a Bad Consumer Experience

Until you commit to getting into the mind of a consumer when you review your website, you won't be able to make improvements that increase engagement and ultimately sales. Dealers have become so focused on digital marketing and looking at their website from a business standpoint that they've become a bit blinded to the actual consumer experience.

Is your dealership website just showing inventory like an online brochure?

You're likely looking at your website and asking the questions, “Did the website get me more leads? Which tool converted the most leads? Did we get any leads through chat?” Usually, the overall “forest” of the actual consumer experience on your website can get lost in the all the “trees” you are constantly monitoring for conversion performance.

Online Consumer Experience Checklist: Are you Scaring Visitors Away?

Get into the mind of the consumer, visit your website and then go through this checklist to see whether you have an experience that lives up to what consumers expect from top brands that makes them WANT to engage. Or are you instead creating an experience that makes them want to avoid engaging?

1. Home Page

Does the website immediately give you the feeling that this is a different dealership that cares about the experience, or does it just seem the same as every other dealer's website? Does the website have clean and simple messaging to help you get started, or does it seem like there are multiple messages and things jumping at you and competing for your attention?

2. SRP

Is the website just showing inventory like it's an online brochure, or is it giving you a way to help narrow your choices by finding out more about what you are looking for in a vehicle? Does it feel overwhelming? What's guiding consumers toward finding a specific vehicle?

3. CTA on a VDP

Is it just a static lead form that only benefits the dealer or is it interactive and provides immediate value to the shopper? The only place a website should have a basic lead form is around "Request More Information" or "Contact Us."

4. After You Complete a CTA Experience

After you gave information within a form/tool, did the website suggest a next step that can be helpful and try to keep the relationship moving forward or did the website just treat you like a one-night stand?

5. Click on another CTA After You Complete a Lead Form/Tool

After you gave your contact information, the next time you click on a CTA, did the website show it knows you or did it ask for the same information again?

6. CTAs That Show Up After You Completed a Form/Tool

Is the website still taking up space asking you to complete something (Ex. "Value Your Trade") you already did, or is the website changing to adapt to the information you already gave and encourage a next step?

7. Digital Retailing

If the website allows you to start building toward a deal, does it naturally start taking advantage of everything you already did to make it easy and natural to slide into building a deal, or is it sitting off disconnected as a big separate step? Is your whole website optimized like a shopping cart? Is it only useful during the transaction or is it speaking to the rest of the shopping journey as well?

8. Chat

Once the chat engages, are you able to move your experience forward within chat, or were you basically forced to give up information and wait for a salesperson to call? Is it truly helpful or just another trap?

9. Leave the Website and Come Back

Does the website remember you after you did all of the above, or does it feel like you just came to the website for the first time?

PHASE 3

Improve Your Results

Once you have made your website **Smart, Interactive** and **Connected**, and you've built a complete consumer experience that your website visitors will value, it's time to look at how you can continue to improve results. There are two critical metrics I addressed in Phase 1 that will act as your overall performance guide. You can then work on adjusting the variables within each to see if you can move the needle on sales.

1. Engagement Score

2. Lead to Sale

Engagement Score

If you recall, Engagement Score is the overall metric used to calculate the engagement your website is receiving. The score is made up by taking the average page visits per session, multiplied by the unique website visitor to lead conversion percentage (drop the percent) and multiplied by the average number of registrations (or experiences a lead interacts with). The higher your engagement score, the higher the quality your leads will be and the more leads and sales you will have.



Example Dealer 1: 2.71 X 2.45 X 1.33 = 8.83

Example Dealer 2: 2.35 X 2.31 X 1.89 = 10.26

Example Dealer 3: 3.89 X 1.79 X 1.45 = 10.10

In order to maximize your score, there are areas you can review on your website that you can change and test to impact the score:

1. Traffic to Click: First, evaluate how effective your CTAs are in getting clicks. If you are not giving visitors a compelling reason to click to engage deeper, then there is zero chance they will take the next steps to give you information about themselves.

Ways to improve:

- a. *Personalize CTAs based on source / medium.*
- b. *Utilize consumer profile data to personalize messaging based on their shopping preferences.*
- c. *Utilize interactive hover effects, animation and responsiveness.*
- d. *Constantly test everything and follow the data.*

2. Click to Conversion: After you are getting clicks on your CTAs, you then need to look at Click to Lead conversion on each one. These percentages can vary wildly depending on some areas you can test to try to improve:

- a. *A static lead form is going to be very low, where a compelling interactive experience can be dramatically higher because it provides immediate value and doesn't require a salesperson.*
- b. *Having good messaging and a good offer, and changing how you ask for contact information can impact the click-to-lead conversion by as much as 15%. Testing for the best results here can have a big impact on conversion.*

3. Average Number of Experiences per Lead: This is where you can judge how deep your website traffic is engaging with your website experience. If someone was willing to give you their information and become a "lead" at some point on your website, how many

other tools or resources did they engage with on your website? When someone is arriving on your website, they are very rarely on there to just give up their information so you can call them. They are researching vehicles.

Here are some areas to improve that can increase this metric:

a. More resources

The more types of interactions and premium content available, the more likely you are going to have something for everyone. The wide range of consumers on your site means you will want a wide variety of ways for them to interact on your site.

b. More education around tools

Web visitors won't use what they don't know is there. You have to disrupt the typical expectation that your website is going to be full of lead traps like most dealers. Educate your website visitors on what is different and better about your website.

c. Connected

Everything should feel like it's all part of the same experience. This means the design and flow should always encourage an easy next step that improves the experience and encourages a path toward an eventual purchase.

d. Interactive

Everything on your website should encourage two-way communication and respond to the user's input in a personalized manner. Only the foundation of your website should be an experience that is the same to everyone. Everything else should be personalized to each individual visitor.

e. Smart

Always try and be one step ahead of your consumer by anticipating what they may want to do next. Leverage your ability to know what most people do that are completing a similar interaction. One example could be that it's normal for a consumer to want to estimate a payment after already doing a trade evaluation and picking out a vehicle. Or, that they may want to get pre-approved right after scheduling a test drive.

4. Average Time on Website: The longer visitors spend on your site, the more likely they are to convert into a sale. Just like inside your dealership, just spending time on the lot improves the likelihood they will buy.

5. Traffic Source Measurement: You have to understand not just where traffic is coming from but the difference in quality for each source. Look at all the layers of conversion by channel and compare them to your overall average. Is each source lower or higher? What converts leads at the highest rate? Trim the fat off those traffic sources that don't produce an acceptable ROI.

Lead to Sale

By focusing on the lead-to-close metric, you can improve the following processes at your dealership:

1. Benchmarking: How good are you at following up on and closing leads compared to how you did 6 months ago or compared to other dealers? Most dealers we speak to don't have good clarity on this very important metric.

2. Sales Person Follow Up and In-Store Process: Once you have a lot more data on your leads, you may want to revise the way you follow up on leads or start leveraging the consumer profile when the consumer comes in store. How will you know if you improved? How can you tell which salesperson is doing the best job? The "Lead to Sale" metric will tell the story.

3. Lead Nurturing: Once you see the timelines consumers are looking to purchase, you can better personalize your lead nurturing process. You will now have a metric to measure whether it was effective.

4. Advertising Channel Measurement: By tying back the source of the website traffic to the lead and then to the sale, you can start having better insight into where to spend more or less money.

Results

Once you enable your website to give a better connected research experience, you will start seeing improved results. Here are some averages we have found to be true across our customer base:

- **25-100% Increase Visitor to CTA Click**
- **50-200% Increase in Visitor to Lead**
- **50-300% Increase in Click to Lead**
- **50-200% Increase in Website Engagement**
- **10-50% Increase in Lead to Close**
- **5-15% Average Gross Profit Increase per Lead Sold**



Learn how other dealerships using the PERQ Web Engagement software improved their results. Check out: perq.com/success-stories

Summary

You should now have all the key components necessary to: Create an Engaging Website Experience, Personalize Your Website for Consumers and Improve Your Results.

Consumers today expect a guided experience online and don't want to feel like your website is constantly trying to trap them into giving up their information. Your goal is to meet the online research demands of today's consumers to help you drive more showroom sales.

As you may have recognized, we feel the most important piece to reach your goal is making sure your website is Smart, Interactive and Connected. If you continually make sure your website improves in

these three areas, you will be well on your way to having a much better experience for online car shoppers that will give your dealership superior results. Dealers can be in the driver's seat when it comes to improving the online car shopping journey.

At PERQ, we are extremely passionate about improving the digital connection between consumers and dealers. Our knowledge and what we continue to learn helps to develop and improve our PERQ Web Engagement product and we wanted to share what we've learned along the way through this book.

The best news is we plan to continue the journey of developing new and better ways for dealers to provide an enhanced experience to consumers, and one that allows both parties to reach their desired goals in alignment with each other. We look forward to seeing the results our commitment will bring to you.

Get into the minds of online car buyers!

Check out the *Car Buyer Insights Report* from PERQ



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