

Automotive News

Dealership marketers take to text messaging

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Who's sending that text message to your cell phone? It could be your neighborhood auto dealer.

Dealers are joining other auto advertisers in marketing on mobile phones. Consumers now can gain access to many dealerships' listings of new and used vehicles — complete with photos, prices, condition reports, contact information and directions to the showroom — on their phones.

Consumers rather than dealers activate the text messages.

Dealers, meanwhile, are using traditional print and broadcast ads to alert cell phone users to the new venue.

"If you are walking out of the house in the morning, what do you take with you?" said Mikhail Melomed, Internet director at Honda Mall of Georgia in the Atlanta suburb of Buford. "The cell phone. It is the most direct way to market. It is just like a Web site. It creates walk-in traffic and inquiries."

Customers can get information about Melomed's dealership by entering a keyword and a five-digit code on their cell phones, just as if they were voting on "American Idol."

Who's calling?

Dealers cite these features of cell-phone marketing.

- Consumers can get vehicle-inventory listings with photos and prices.
- TV, radio and print ads can direct customers to digital shopping.
- Young buyers are especially likely to opt for digital dialogue.

Ads contain codes

The dealership uses numerical codes in its outdoor, print and online advertising. Newspaper ads provide code numbers for specific vehicles.

"Every sticker on the used cars has that code attached," Melomed said. "If someone sees a vehicle on the lot after hours, they can dial that specific car. Or if a customer calls, a salesperson texts the vehicle to the cell phone with all the information."

The dealership has used mobile marketing since January, Melomed said. The service appeals especially to consumers between the ages of 18 and 40, he said. Some customers want information about a vehicle without talking to a salesperson, he added.

Mobile marketing helps dealers track results of traditional advertising and interest in particular vehicles, Melomed said. "I know who is looking at a specific car today," he said.

This month, the dealership is offering a special incentive: a \$100 gasoline card for buyers of new vehicles who conduct their searches on their cell phones.

'Great and surprising results'

Sage Automotive Group has seen "great and surprising results" from mobile marketing at its Nissan dealership,

partner Michael Sage said. The group operates seven dealerships in the Los Angeles area.

"We are able to connect to the young generation of car buyers in the way they want to be communicated to," Sage told *Automotive News*. "We are happy with that."

Universal City Nissan has boosted sales by using mobile codes in newspaper and radio ads over the past four months, Sage said. "We get as many as 20 to 30 text inquiries when we run the radio spot," he said.

Cell-phone ads typically appeal most to consumers who seek prices or information about a specific vehicle, said Richard Abronson, co-founder of Gumiyo. The suburban Los Angeles company provides mobile marketing services to "hundreds" of dealers, he said.

Mobile marketing "creates entirely new opportunities for consumers to respond to advertising at the moment they see it," Abronson said. It especially benefits customers near the end of the purchase cycle, he said.

Consumers don't mind getting text messages from dealerships even though they have to pay to receive the ads, Abronson said.

Said Abronson: "The consumers who are going to do this already know what their text messaging and data plan is."

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